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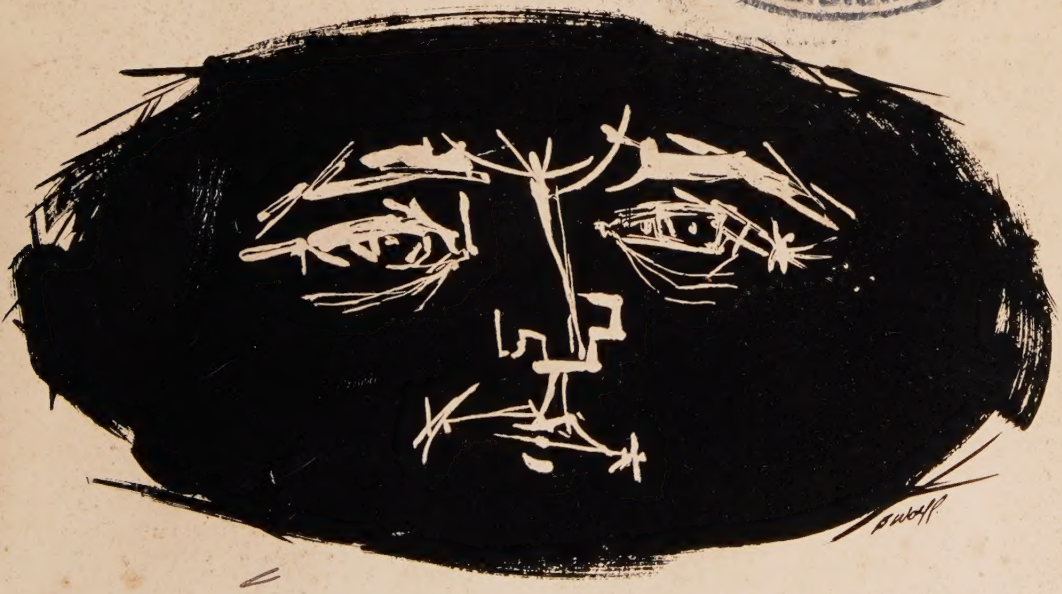

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THE TRANSATLANTIC REVIEW

Number 4 Summer 1960

LONDON AND NEW YORK

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NEW YORK 821 Second Avenue, 17 and Box 3348 Grand Central Station, 17

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THE TRANSATLANTIC REVIEW is published quarterly at 821 Second Avenue, New York, 17, N.Y. Subscription $3.50 a year. Single copy $1. Distributor: Publishers Cooperative Distributing Service, Box 2387, Grand Central Station, New York 17, N.Y. Issue Number Four published August 30, 1960. Application for second-class mail privileges is pending at New York, N.Y.

Printed in Great Britain at The Curwen Press
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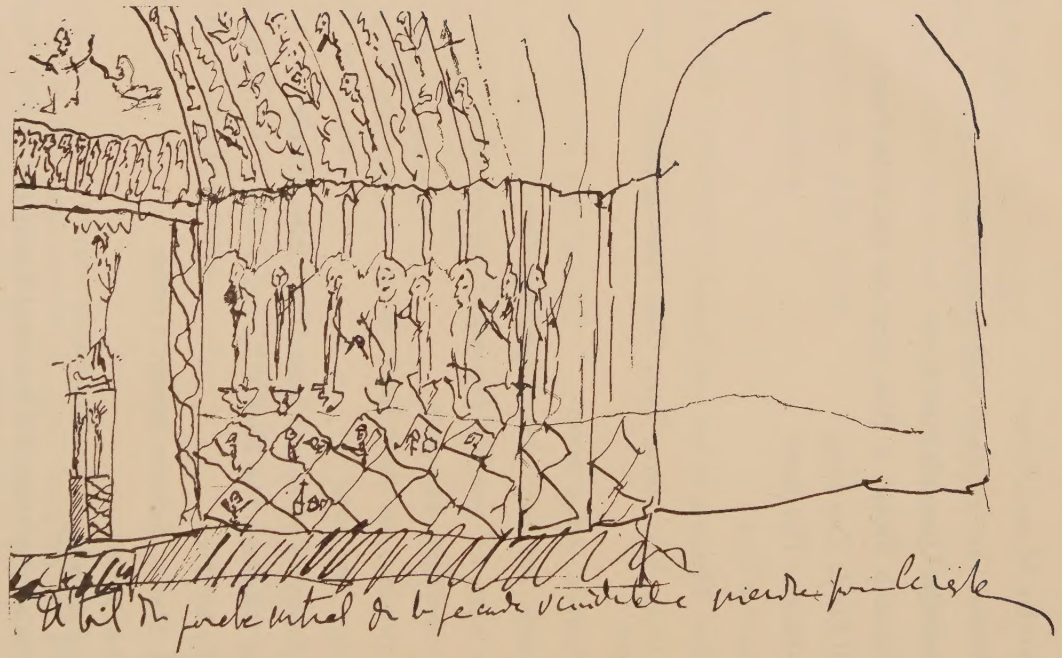

Drawing by Marcel Proust

Conversations with Gore Vidal

Eugene Walter

I first saw Gore Vidal on Umnak Island, in the Aleutians, during the war, in the midst of a roaring blizzard. He caught my attention at once by his self-possession. He had just landed on the Island, which is remote, desolate, sad. What I remember most is that he was very young, and that he kept looking about, taking everything in, while the other soldiers, mostly older, were grumbling and cursing and pulling their fur parkas about their faces. I watched him as he stamped his boots in the snow and turned his head this way and that. (An observer observed!) Later, in New York in 1946 when WILLIWAW was published, I bought the novel at once on the peculiarly Aleutian recommendation of the name (that of a howling wind that comes from the Bering Sea and crosses the islands) and recognized the photograph of the author. I was impressed by the tightly-written, unpretentious quality of the book, and followed the work of Vidal from then on. IN A YELLOW WOOD came in 1947, THE CITY AND THE PILLAR in 1948, THE SEASON OF COMFORT in 1949, and two books in 1950: A SEARCH FOR THE KING (an historical novel on the Richard-Blondel theme) and DARK GREEN, BRIGHT RED. Then came a breathing spell before THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS in 1952, and a longer pause before MESSIAH in 1954. (Since then there has been a collection of short stories, a book of television plays, and the comedy, VISIT TO A SMALL PLANET.) The last two novels had small success, to my complete mystification, for they are of high excellence, balanced, intuitive, witty, and with a distinctive and unforgettable acid flavor all their own. THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS is an account of a young American's *wanderjahr* in Europe, crowded with amusing characters and incidents. MESSIAH is black satire: an image of America dominated by a television god; it has a Jacobean consciousness of mortality, a dry style—moreover, the reader is not invited to identify himself with any of the characters. All is lucid, understated, bitter. When I read it, I thought, 'If this had been translated from the French, how the reviewers would fall out in a dead faint, and how the readers would argue over it'. But it was home-grown and somehow got lost in the shuffle, while several big slovenly novels from semi-literate writers made the news. When I heard Vidal was coming to Italy, I couldn't wait to see him. We had been acquainted briefly in New York in 1946, but now, years and books later, I was full of questions to ask. We met in Rome, and he agreed to an interview.

I

A small salon in the Grand Hôtel, Rome.

Interviewer: Shall we do the statistics and so forth? Your frame of reference?

Vidal: I was born October 3, 1925, at West Point, New York. Within a year my family moved to Washington, D.C. I was raised there and in nearby Virginia.

Int: And your name: were you named after your grandfather, the Senator?

Vidal: He was Thomas Pryor Gore of Oklahoma; my name is Eugene Luther Gore Vidal. I wasn't named for him, although he had a great influence in my life. He was blind from the age of ten; I read to him on and off for seventeen years.

Int: He was a very interesting figure, wasn't he? What did you read to him?

Vidal: Oh, yes, he brought Oklahoma into the Union in 1907, and he was the first Senator. What did we read? Well, I read him Constitutional History and British common law mostly; for pleasure we had Brann's THE ICONOCLAST and the Victorian poets. In his attic in Rock Creek Park, D.C. (I describe that house in a short story, A MOMENT OF GREEN LAUREL) there were seven or eight thousand books. The first that I could read by myself was called THE DUCK AND THE KANGAROO. My favorites were Lane's ARABIAN NIGHTS and a 19th century STORIES FROM LIVY.

Int: Your education . . .?

Vidal: Lots of schools. From 11 until 14 I was in St. Alban's, in Washington. I was a year at Los Alamos, then 3 years at Exeter which were among the happiest of my life. You know, getting away from the family and its problems. My first novel was written at Exeter when I was 15. At least, part of a first novel, because I had a terrible problem for years: I could finish nothing. But I did about 100 pages of that one, all about Mussolini, his mistress, spies, very florid – the result of a trip to Rome in 1939. I wrote quite a few short stories, too.

Int: And verse?

Vidal: Some rather didactic verse. As a poet I was a profound moralist with a resolute metre – terrible, thumping stuff.

Int: Then you always knew you were cut out to be a writer?

Vidal: Oh, no! There was an awful crisis in my mind – the choice

between politics and literature. I was brought up with the idea of going into politics; all the family were in politics. Even my father, an aviation man, was in Roosevelt's Little Cabinet as Director of Air Commerce. And the Gores are forever running for office all around the South. The family was originally from Mississippi.

Int: Did you write a great deal then? When did you first publish?

Vidal: In the EXETER REVIEW, of which I was an editor. I published three stories before I graduated in June, 1943; went into the Army in July, 1943, was sent to Army Training Group at V.M.I. for one term, where I wrote part of another novel. The writer I had read and studied and chosen for my model was – this may surprise you, but then I was an unworldly seventeen! – Somerset Maugham. I had also met, in the bridge-playing world of my mother, Michael Arlen who knew Maugham, so the novel I was trying to write was really CAKES AND ALE all over again, with Maugham instead of Hardy, Arlen instead of Hugh Walpole, and myself as Maugham writing it. It was a beautifully weary book, in what is now the grand tradition of adolescent novel-writing.

Int: You must have started WILLIWAW about then . . .

Vidal: Well, let's see: when I left hospital I was dumped into the infantry, and then got into the Air Force, then into crash boats, then passed an examination as a First Mate, knowing nothing of navigation save what I learned from memorizing a book on the subject. Finally, I was sent to the Aleutian Islands as First Mate of the F.S.35. Fortunately, it was so foggy that no one ever discovered I couldn't set a course. We relied on Point to Point navigation: a symbol? Anyway, up there making a regular run between Chernowski Bay and Dutch Harbor, in December, 1944, I wrote half of WILLIWAW in pencil in a grey ledger marked *Accounts*; then, for the fourth time I gave up, convinced I couldn't finish anything. Meanwhile, I had slyly contracted arthritis, was hospitalized in Los Angeles. After, I was sent to Florida to train 18-year-olds. One night alone in Headquarters – I was Officer of the Day – there was hurricane warning up, and everything was shuttered against the coming storm – I had just seen Boris Karloff in *Isle of the Dead* – that night I finished WILLIWAW.

Int: How did WILLIWAW come to be published?

Vidal: I first took the novel and a bunch of poems to Roger

Linscott at Random House who liked the poems but wouldn't read the novel because it was in longhand. He seemed to lack dedication. But I had the book typed. There was a woman doing a life of Amelia Earhart, and when she came to interview my father, who had known the flyer, I showed her the manuscript. She suggested I take it to Nicholas Wreden of Dutton's. I did and we got on well; he said he'd publish it, and offered me a job when I got out of the army. I worked at Dutton six months, until WILLIWAW came out in April, 1946, and I quit on the strength of the notices. Couldn't stand going to an office. I have never gone to an office since. So, having attained some recognition, I fled to Guatemala where I lived off and on for three years and wrote IN A YELLOW WOOD and THE CITY AND THE PILLAR. Those three books were written between the ages of 19 and 21. And it is depressing to think that I am still known primarily for such green work. My later books are a good deal more right, and very different. But literary reputations change slowly.

II

Amalfi. We had driven down – a party of four – in an ancient Mercedes touring car suitable for a retired or deported gangster. We spent the night wandering about the deserted streets, hearing only the stream that tumbles down the mountain and rushes through the city to the sea. Vidal used the town for an episode in THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS, *but he had not visited it for some years. The next morning we breakfasted on a terrace overlooking the sea and continued our conversations.*

Int: If you please, I should like a bit of history on THE CITY AND THE PILLAR. One has heard so many contradictory statements concerning it, why you wrote it, whether or not it's autobiographical, all that.

Vidal: Well, first of all, it is not 'about' homosexuality. The actual theme is not unlike Alain-Fournier's: if one continues always to look back, to relate everything to a first affair, one is emotionally, even humanly destroyed. The pillar of salt. Oh, I realize that the ending of THE CITY AND THE PILLAR smacks of *Tosca*, but it was inevitable. I think now that if I had not written the novel so realistically, I could have made that ending work. But I deliberately chose a flat grey style which I thought would give immediacy to certain human facts which

up till then had not been frankly handled in America. I wanted an undecorated, a graphic effect. And I did very much want to shock. As for autobiography, the book, like all of my work, is invented, down to the last detail. There were absolutely no originals of the characters.

Int: You rely on imagination more than observation then?

Vidal: What Thackeray called the 'fancy'. I am incapable of reporting anything. For me, the fact that something *happened* is quite enough, and needs no further comment. The act of writing is creating something that was *not*, and to make it *real*. A novelist, as I see it, must invent the truth.

Int: What effect did the publication of the book have on your life, literary and personal?

Vidal (*pauses, then smiles slowly*)*:* Let me take a deep breath and tell you. First, I was at that time the author of two books embarrassingly admired – embarrassingly because I was under 21 and newspaper praise is a false thing at best, though, I suspect now, preferable to blame. I was the Huck Finn of the younger novelists, photographed against ships for *Life Magazine*, boyishly scowling. I seemed as safe as . . . who? Herman Wouk? I was in the running. Then came the bomb: THE CITY AND THE PILLAR. I remember I read it through once before it was sent to the printer, and I thought that if I ever read it again I'd never publish it . . . So I sent back a hardly-corrected proof. Then the reviews, what few there were, began and I discovered what happens in America if you tamper with the fragile – people avert their eyes, and go on talking. Half of my former admirers did not review it at all. *The New York Times* refused to advertise it—and when the publishers took the matter directly to Mr. Sulzberger, he decided to uphold his censor. Of the reviews received, a few were thoughtful and lengthy, most quite bad. Two words popped up to haunt that book, and all my writing ever since: 'clinical' and 'sterile'. 'Clinical' is used whenever one writes of relationships which are not familiar – I dare say that if the story had dealt with a boy and a girl instead of two boys the book would have been characterized as 'lyrical'. 'Sterile' is an even deadlier curse upon the house, and comes from a dark syllogism in the American *zeitgeist*: the homosexual act does not produce children therefore it is sterile; Mr. X's book is concerned with the homosexual act therefore the book is sterile. (This syllogism was first proposed by the Russians when

they turned on André Gide and it used to be a standard Stalinist line.) But despite the absence of reviews and no advertisements in *The New York Times*, the book was a bestseller. Aesthetically, the book was very youthful, very naïve, hasty but 'felt', and I suppose in a way that the rudeness of its execution was part of its strength and the reason why it goes on year after year being read. I still think publishing it was a virtuous act and I would do it again, hard fate though it has been in some ways. One quite lost the newspaper reviewers, which was sad because their gentle twittering was always a great comfort; after all, I belong to no literary clique; I am outside the Academy; I have no friends who slyly review me . . . the business of literary politics has never figured in my life. Do I make myself seem a dark literary prince? More sinned against, etc.? I certainly mean to! And one does get what one wants, despite the querulous tone, the occasional misgivings. Forcing the world to adjust to oneself has always seemed to me an honorable life work . . . that one fails in the end is irrelevant.

Int: Did you receive many letters from readers?

Vidal: Just before the book was published the Kinsey Report came out, and I received a charming letter from Dr. Kinsey complimenting me on 'my work in the field'! But I also received about 2,000 letters, mostly of a confessional nature, from every corner of the world (the book was translated into French, Italian, Dutch, Norwegian, German, etc.).

Int: Do you still have echoes of it?

Vidal: Oh, yes. Letters still come. Critically . . . well, for instance, there was a young critic who began a distinguished critical career by particularly admiring and celebrating the heterosexual love scenes of IN A YELLOW WOOD but then later, after the appearance of THE CITY AND THE PILLAR, declared that I was unable to write convincingly of the man-woman relationship: a *volte-face* which I forgive him but which I find continuously burdensome as I proceed upon my 'clinical' and 'sterile' way. One could write ANNA KARENINA now and get the same reaction.

Int: Let's see, you finished that book in Guatemala: where did you go next?

Vidal: I finished THE SEASON OF COMFORT down there, too. I lived in the ruins of a 16th-century Carmelite convent in Antigua. Well, after THE CITY AND THE PILLAR was published,

I came to Europe in March, 1948. I went straight to Rome where I had a friend, Frederic Prokosch. Then I met Tennessee Williams and we drove all around Italy in a jeep. All this time I was writing A SEARCH FOR THE KING. Then back to Paris, to the U.S., a last trip to Guatemala (to write DARK GREEN, BRIGHT RED), then Paris again, and back to the U.S.

Int: I'm dizzy. What year are we now?

Vidal (chuckling): 1950 was a crucial year – when I published two novels: A SEARCH FOR A KING which had good reviews and no sales, and DARK GREEN, BRIGHT RED which had bad notices and no sales – and optimistically bought the house at Barrytown on the Hudson River where I still live; went broke; wrote in an absolute explosion of delight THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS, a picaresque which is my best book. It was quite well received; sold pretty well enough. To support myself, I took to lecturing – colleges, ladies' clubs – a chilling experience. Then at my wit's end, I wrote three mystery stories under a pseudonym. And, as is usual with works of the left hand, they were all successful. Meanwhile, I was working on MESSIAH, which was published in 1954, to sink serenely beneath the waves, although it was well regarded in Europe. Survival was now a desperate matter. So I hit upon a kind of five-year plan: an all-out raid upon television, which could make me enough money to live the rest of my life. It's been a fascinating, wearying experience. The plan was finished two years ago, and barring the unexpected I am, in a modest way, financially set for life. If one has the stamina, there's a lot to be said for piracy.

Int: Will you write more novels?

Vidal: Oh, yes. I have one in my head now but curiously enough whereas I could never think of ideas for plays a few years ago, now I think of nothing but ideas for plays: the old novel instinct has gone temporarily into the theatre. One tends to invent in one form or the other. The unexpected thing about my five-year plan is that I came to enjoy play-writing and as one enjoys it one respects it, which I didn't at first.

Int: Which gives you greater satisfaction, your novels or your plays?

Vidal: The novel. If only because I don't get the play deep enough or the characters rich enough for my purposes. I think this failure has to do with language. I'm not happy with naturalistic dialogue: I don't much use it, as you'll see, in those books I've

written since 21, and yet I haven't found an alternative to the terrible naturalistic gabble in our theatre, the racket of 'Do come in', 'Drink?' 'Yes', 'Where'd you leave it?' 'Upstairs', 'Well, go look, etc.' I don't do it much better than the others, but what I have done, and what interests me, is to clown, to be funny, bizarre – I enjoy comedic invention, both high and low, there is almost nothing quite so satisfying as making an audience laugh while removing their insides.

Int: Tell me about your television adaptations, about dealing with Faulkner, James, etc.?

Vidal: I did them for money of course – but I always tried to pick a writer I respected – or at least that I thought I could do something respectable with. I was most successful with Faulkner and James. I have a considerable affection for James, but not much for Faulkner. I failed entirely with Hemingway, and so has nearly everyone else, which makes one wonder about the original . . . or at least about its viability in *our* time.

Int: You were saying you invented everything, but weren't there some characters in IN A YELLOW WOOD who were recognizably well-known New York literary and social figures?

Vidal: Well, let's say sometimes I drew small caricatures in the margin . . . peripheral doodling. The thing accomplished is 'made', not recorded. Odd how people – even knowing ones – think it's always one's own life. I suppose they are so accustomed to the self-obsessed Thomas Wolfe sort of thing that the whole idea of invention is both discredited and disbelieved.

Int: Interesting, too, how THE CITY AND THE PILLAR was considered scandalous in America, and considered a moral work in Europe.

Vidal: I am, and don't entirely understand why, a moralistic writer in a very American way. I seem always to be writing about a moral choice and . . . well, that's for the critics to worry about.

III

On the terrace of the Trattoria Paris, in the Trastevere section of Rome. The motorbikes roared and blasted past us, a thin hedge away, as we dined and talked.

Int: Do you feel that your early interest in history and politics has done a great deal in shaping you as a novelist?

Vidal: Yes. You know Bernard Shaw used to say that religion and politics . . . in the large sense . . . are the only things that should concern a man; they certainly fascinate me though they are currently unfashionable preoccupations. The contemporary novel has split: on the one hand there is the private universe novel, unrelated to the society around it, unrelated to the fact of death. I suppose Nathalie Sarraute has taken it quite as far as anyone in our period . . . the anti-novel (old-fashioned actually . . . the Goncourts used to write them, and very glum they were). Then there are the busy popular novels. All that concern over who divorces whom and why this marriage failed and who's to get custody of those children and finally, who cares? Even Maisie has got to know a very great deal to save that sort of novel. And love! Dear God, the horror Love has become in our culture! Mr. X. don't write so good, but he does feel Love is the only thing which matters, and Compassion, too . . . and everyone gets a warm glow from Mr. X's stylized compassion. It is the stunning cliché of our literature, and the largest lie about man's estate. Whitehead once wrote that the way to assess a society is not by what it says of itself but those things it does not say, the never-mentioned, the taken-for-granted. Well, it seems to me that the underlying assumption of our society is that Love (something vague, anodyne, splendid) is every man's due and of course not only is it not every man's due, it is not always desirable. Flaubert was fascinated by that theme! Bovarism . . . Only his Emma was a woman of meagre intelligence while some of our very best writers are neatly impaled on this same folly. A satire on the Romantic assumption is in order now. How wonderful to be the first contemporary novelist *not* to tack the ensign of Love to his mast. Paul Bowles of course attempted the reverse in LET IT COME DOWN; at the end, his protagonist achieves perfect alienation . . . I suppose it's the same thing turned inside out but it was amiable to read.

Int: Then you would deal with the grand problems?

Vidal: Yes! the great emotions, the great crises . . . anything to keep from surrendering to the idea that we are all victimized by the hugeness of society. Even if this is true, one should still attack the giant head-on; the alternative is paralysis or, worse, deliberate smallness. *We all know so much more than we write.* And why don't we write it? Because we are afraid of being thought stupid or wicked or . . . unlovable.

IV

Bricktop's Club, under the Via Veneto, Rome. After Bricktop sang her definitive version of Miss Otis Regrets, *we settled down in a corner for some quiet drinking, and to finish our interview.*

Int: Could you tell me a little of your working methods?

Vidal: Novels in longhand, plays on the typewriter, the morning hours. I begin with a vague idea of the knot to be tied or untied. I always think of every writer having in his head a repertory theatre with a resident company of players. Some play themselves over and over again, some are more protean. When I decide the knot, I 'cast' the novel, using the actors I need. Sometimes I mis-cast. Sometimes I curse the short-comings of my company but I can't fire them: they are aspects of one's own personality . . . they have term contracts.

Int: Do you rewrite much?

Vidal: I write first drafts with great speed but the older I get (a familiar observation, I know) I rewrite more and more. When I first started, it was like working in egg-tempera – flat, quick-drying, on a wall, one got it right or one didn't. In shorter works like WILLIWAW I got it right. In others I got it wrong. I'm more an oil-painter now. More deliberate. A good deal less certain.

Int: Do you make notes or outlines: keep a notebook?

Vidal: No, I always lose them, because I hate to re-read them. I jot things down occasionally, then never look at them again. Never have more than one page of random notes for an entire novel.

Int: What would you consider the perfect novel: the novel you'd most wish to read?

Vidal: The terrible thing is, I don't want to read *a* novel – I never have. When I read fiction with any delight it has always been when I've the time to read the whole of a man's work, rather than one book.

Int: Who gives you greatest pleasure?

Vidal: Well, different works at different times and in different moods. I suppose my greatest pleasure still comes from Apuleius and Petronius, 'the bright pagan world'. Then I've read all of Flaubert, Proust, Henry James, Meredith, and Peacock, who for a certain kind of thing I often try to do, is the most relevant model. The novel of ideas: a most imprecise designation.

Everybody, of course, would like to have written LE GRAND MEAULNES.

Int: Any others who have been signposts for you?

Vidal: I don't know. One's tendency is to fake influences later, to rearrange history. I suppose Gibbon has had as profound an effect on me as any writer. I don't mean stylistically so much as the effect of his attitude. Then one goes through phases: Lawrence's WOMEN IN LOVE, and Mann's THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN and TONIO KRÖGER. When I was very young the greatest influence – don't know if I dare say it – was Shakespeare. I read all Shakespeare when I was 14 at Los Alamos. *The Yale Shakespeare*, a play to a volume, I read the lot.

Int: And contemporaries?

Vidal: I am much drawn to the moral fabulists William Golding (THE LORD OF THE FLIES) and John Bowen (AFTER THE RAIN, THE TRUTH SHALL NOT HELP US), to Paul Bowles in his short stories. Or to mention someone doing what I try to do: Lawrence Durrell in his Alexandria novels – JUSTINE, BALTHAZAR, etc. – it is dazzling work.

Int: Now a question of style: what led from the documentary style of your first books to the extravagance of THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS?

Vidal: I found that naturalism wasn't natural for me. When I began at 19 to write in a hard flat style it was because that seemed to me the only way to write; it was the national manner. Not till I finished my third book did I realize the style was inadequate for my purposes, and that I must find my own voice and tone. THE SEASON OF COMFORT was the midway work, an experiment and a debacle.

Int: That historical romance, A SEARCH FOR THE KING, how did that pop up in the list of your books?

Vidal: A *jeu d'esprit*. I like the fabulous, the invented, and I dislike repeating myself. I am not captive to one region nor to one unflinching attitude toward life. I am always conscious that we live, in Sir Thomas Browne's phrase – 'in divided and distinguished worlds', and I should never be so presumptuous as to say finally, 'That is it!'

Int: Have you consciously designed the different pitch, or tone, of each of the books?

Vidal (*thoughtfully*)*:* It comes out of the subject and out of oneself at the time. I am a dry clown who has often miscast himself in

the drama; when I've gone wrong in novels it has usually been that my view was not, simply, the useful one of the subject . . . It seems to me, when I am playwriting seriously, that I'm not writing. Yet the emotional concentration is the same. Final relief is more gratifying, yet it's like doing charades. Cousin germane to prose yet not prose.

Int: A couple of last points . . . didn't you stir up a hornet's nest in America a year or so ago . . . some opinions on the novel . . . ?

Vidal: Yes. I wrote in *The New York Times*, and again in *The Reporter* articles stating very tentatively the proposition that the novel as a popular art form was ended. Now its decline, from the point of view of general interest, is a fact, and I took the line that the fault (this is the reverse of the busy reviewers) is the public's, not the writer's. We have never had more interesting writers than we do today. But the public has sneaked off, and I suggested that the novel, which after all is only 300 years old in our language, was perhaps an inter-regnum form, and that the public, from the Greek mysteries to television, had always preferred the dramatic event.

Int: Your contemporaries mounted high horse over this?

Vidal: Yes. Yet no one bothered to argue the central premise: the brief life of the novel in our language – of which we can observe the origins, flowering, and decline. But then they don't read too carefully, which rather proves the point. Anyway, from what I have seen of the young today, the bright ones are interested in sociology, philosophy at second hand, and of course, criticism.

Int: Ah-ha, and now we come to the inevitable question. What about criticism in America?

Vidal: It's either a monkish avocation conducted in the Academy or it is simply garrulous newspaper writing, and that perfect justice of which we all dream (even if it is summary execution!) is denied us.

Int: Have you noted any critical ideas of any importance in America?

Vidal: I wouldn't know! I read a good deal of criticism, but only as a vice, not so good as reading science fiction, rather better than reading mystery stories. But I do admire the confidence of our nobler critics. They've got it made, and they know it!

Int: Do you think writing for movies, television and so forth is corroding to a writer's more serious work?

Vidal: Unfortunately, one has to earn a living. For me it was less

compromising to write for films than to teach, or review other people's books. Or journalism. Yet there is a destructive element in writing for hire and it is, simply, indifference: a man's defense when he believes or is made to believe that he is misusing his talent (and the world which was indifferent to the talent itself is usually eager to point out its misuse). The sullen response – and especially if he is successful in a worldly way – is indifference. And it must be fought against in the dark hours for indifference is death to the artist. Somewhere in that is a peculiarly American tragedy.

Quincy's First Love: a confession

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There is, in Northern Florida, a river that runs backwards, flowing north instead of south to meet the sea. Along it there are orange groves, potato farms, occasionally a sawmill where cypress logs are cut into lumber and finished into molding. There are little towns isolated along this river. Set off from the towns, in the orange groves, there are old houses, built, many of them, in the 1880's, screened from one another by stands of bamboo; their lawns, in which grow bushes of azalea and japonica, slope downward from front porches to the river's edge.

There, in one of those houses, more run down than the others, with its particular japonica bushes half hidden in tall grass and its surrounding orange trees choking in Spanish moss, I went to spend the curious summer of 1941.

I was in college and so draft exempt, for we were not yet quite at war; but our bones were at war, and whatever we did in those days marked time. Perhaps to mark time is to temporize; if so, then in this thought are many explanations.

My family does not figure in this essay very much, though it was the last summer I ever spent under a parent's roof; think of my mother as a permissive woman with her own worries, and that is all you need to know about her. It was she who found the house, the last one along the banks above the town of Guavalina. Where our back yard started, sixty feet behind the house, the road ended. At the upstream corner of our front yard, trees closed in to the river.

That strange house. Did it have three stories or four? Wasn't there a porch, with slim ornate posts supporting the bowed roof? I am sure, only, of its huge, pale outline – a late Victorian, New England house that loomed and sagged, there by the Southern river. It was hard to imagine its having been built on its site, easier, almost, to believe it had been washed ashore in some gentle flood, starting on the Penobscot, the New Bedford, the St. Lawrence . . .

It had a captain's walk, up on top, enclosed in glass, deserted and unfurnished for how long? Half a century? It was a named house; its name was Moonstone.

We used only a room here and there in Moonstone, along with kitchen and stairs, but all the other rooms were open and most of them were empty. In one might be a stack of leather-bound books, with weather-stuck pages, in another a crate or two of molded clothing. But all the rooms were full of wind off the river, moist

wind sifted through bamboos, and, at night, full of thin moonlight, drifting in through chinks in clapboards, holes in plaster, broken shutters, hingeless doors. It was a beautiful place, in a way, with the special beauty of incongruity threatened, softened, by decay and creeping tangle. In the surrounding orange groves, the trees were going wild, unpruned, bore stunted fruit; in the river, where the lawn ended, a toppled dock soaked water.

To me, it was an exhilarating place, offering all the picturesque solitude a college romantic could want. I was eighteen, then, and ready to begin my sophomore year.

The landlord of Moonstone was a retired British civil servant, a man named Harry Collins. He lived with his American wife, Naomi, in the next place down the river. My mother and Naomi Collins had known one another as girl school-teachers in Florida, before my birth, before their marriages, in the electric imminence of another war.

Naomi – I was asked to call the Collinses by their first names; she was a pretty, freckled lady, given to wearing gauzy, blue-white dresses; a passionate gardener. Her husband was much older, stiff, straight-backed and diabetic, with the traditional florid face and white mustache and a gruff manner. He wore white suits. Their place was about two hundred yards down the river, around a slight bend, to be reached from Moonstone through the screen of green bamboos and aging grapefruit trees, sixty yards of pathless tangle. The Collins' citrus grove was in excellent shape, of course, and so were their lawn, their dock, their unused boathouse. Set quite far up the lawn from the boathouse was their dwelling, a cool, low house of stucco, rather casual.

Eventually I made my own path to the Collinses through the tangle on the river bank, but the first time I went there Mother and I were asked for tea and went around back, by the road. I recall that the first thing Harry Collins said was a question, to me:

'What's your age, son?'

'Eighteen, sir,' I said.

He grunted, and I knew what it meant: in England an eighteen year old was a boy who had left Eton many bloody months ago, to fly a Spitfire in bitter dogfights, high above the English Channel.

Tea went slowly. Harry Collins's bread and butter had to be weighed on a finely calibrated scale, and the amounts written down, and there was a fuss when, after the weighing, it turned out

that Naomi had left his saccharine in her purse, upstairs; they had been out, scales and all I supposed, to lunch.

'Get it, Naomi. Hurry, my tea is getting cold,' he shouted. Then, when she offered to pour the tea back into the pot, he held her there, away from the saccharine, for a lecture on why tea must not be returned to teapots, nor drunk cold either, by God, if things are properly organized. Then there was a discussion of what various people in neighboring places along the river were doing for the war effort – which ones were plane-spotters and wardens, or were having soldiers out from nearby bases for Sunday meals, and which were the slackers.

I told them that I hoped to go to work for the Geodetic Survey, which was trying to eradicate the lilies, which choked parts of the river, by chopping them up from small boats; this sounded both virile and governmental, and Harry approved.

Naomi and Harry were doing many things, not the least of which was quartering the wife and daughter of the colonel of a National Guard unit, recently activated and assigned to Camp Blanding. They were doing this without accepting rent, Mother had told me. For herself, my mother had recently taken on U.S.O. duties. This pleased the Collinses, and they gave her news of their latest, most exciting project:

'Some friends in England have sent their little girls over here, away from the bombing,' Naomi said. 'We're going to have them for the summer.'

'They're on their way?' my mother asked.

'In St. Augustine,' Harry said. 'With an aunt.' It was clear from his tone that he did not consider an American aunt a fit guardian for two gently reared little English girls.

'How nice,' Mother said. 'How old are the children?'

'Very young,' Naomi said. 'Joan and Margaret. We haven't met them, but each has written a note. Poor things. How lost they must feel.'

That was the first mention I'd heard of Joan's name; it passed me by. The Colonel's daughter, whose name was Georgia, had shown up, refused tea, and was watching me. She was an attractive seventeen year old; all seventeen year olds are attractive, for that matter. Georgia had dark hair and dark eyes, which she used to let me know that she was ready to flirt. In a few minutes, I had got her to agree to walk back with me for a look at Moonstone. We went back through the bamboos, along the river bank, into

the Moonstone yard; stopped and looked briefly, saying barely a word, walked on into the orange grove somewhat urgently where we stopped again and I summarily kissed her. She acquiesced. I felt. She submitted for a moment, and then pulled away. We kissed again, but with a sort of finality, so that I was unsurprised when she said, in a *nolo contendere* voice: 'You're too fast.'

I recognized this as beyond coquetry, a plea for truce with honor which I was bound to accept. Walking back to the Collinses, she justified herself: she was going steady, she said, but the boy was away. Code required that I accept this, too, and we returned to where the adults were as allies, though in what cause we did not know.

Later that week, I suddenly became useful to Harry Collins, and my standing with him improved somewhat. The little British girls must be brought over from St. Augustine, and Harry didn't drive. Naomi Collins did, but her husband considered her very bad at it, and perhaps she was. Mother volunteered in my behalf; the lily-chopping job had not come through yet; I didn't mind. So Mrs. Collins and I set off quite cheerfully one morning on our errand; Georgia went along, for the ride and a swim at the beach.

It was a successful day. The aunt, who spent the day with Naomi out of sight somewhere, had a large house, right on the beach, where the sand and water are as white and blue as the imagined beaches that one aches for during inland winters. We were presented to the little English girls; they wore awkward looking clothes, and no make-up. Margaret seemed twelve, a tall, boisterous child with pretty eyes and brown hair. Joan, who had blond, silky hair and seemed pale, I took for fourteen; she was a good deal quieter than her sister. Georgia and I liked them as well as what we took to be the difference in ages permitted – which is to say, we thought they were nice children, jollied them, saw that they didn't swim out too far, got them back in time for lunch, and concurrently ignored them in resuming, temporarily, only for pastime, our flirtation of three days earlier.

In the evening we all drove back. Harry was delighted to see us, and delighted with the girls. They looked as schoolgirls ought. He had never concealed his disapproval of Georgia's make-up, and of her obvious interest in boys. Now he was eager to provide games and storybooks for his young guests, to make them happy, to show us what nice little girls were like. I was quite bored with it, but

watched politely for a decent space of time. Then Georgia walked me back to Moonstone.

'What do you think of the girls?' she asked, when we were on my lawn.

'Aren't they nice-mannered?' I said. 'English kids are very charming.'

'That Joan's no kid,' Georgia said. 'She's been talking to me. She's seventeen.'

It made no difference. I kept on, in the next few days, my desultory flirtation with Georgia; she was waiting, it was understood, for that boy to return from wherever he was. A little light necking was all right with both of us. To the English girls, I continued being jolly; the announcement of Joan's age hadn't changed her personality in my mind. If anything, I would begin to feel a little sorry for her and then think: what the hell, Harry wouldn't let her go out and dance and have dates even if she did know how.

I didn't get the Geodetic Survey job; ten days were gone. I had to have something. I went to work in town, at the cypress mill. I got 32 cents an hour there, for a ten-hour day, feeding a molding machine under a hot tin roof. It was the hardest work I'd ever done, and I came home, the first few days, completely beaten out, my clothes full of sweat and sawdust, deaf from the clamor of machinery. I neither flirted nor jollied, those first evenings, was able to do no more when I got home than ease myself into the river where I'd float for half an hour before supper without moving more than enough to keep myself from going downstream with the sluggish current. There, gradually, I would cool off, my back and legs would straighten, and my ears regain their sense of proportionate sound.

After supper, instead of going to the Collinses, I read, or simply sat out on the lawn in the long, late twilight, thinking and smoking a cheap, sweet Florida cigar. This change in evening habits was only partly because of tiredness; two other things effected it. Georgia's boy was back, and my new job had lowered me in Harry Collins's esteem; it was proletarian work, poor white work. It didn't bother me much that he should feel so. Still, it surprised me when, in the second week of the English girls' stay, I was summoned to the Collins place and asked, by Naomi, if I would be willing, on Saturday night, to take Joan to the juke place where the local teen-agers and younger college kids had their dates and

did their dancing. It would be nice for Joan to meet some of the young people, Naomi thought.

My first reaction was annoyance with Georgia; I knew that she must have started this with Naomi – it didn't occur to me that Joan herself might have started it with Georgia – and that Naomi must then have prevailed on Harry. If she had, it wasn't by much, for when Harry joined us he was quite thoroughly disgruntled. But apparently he had said all right, and because I had a feeling that I would be able to release someone from tyranny a little, I said gravely to Naomi that I'd be delighted to comply. As I left the porch where this interview with the Collinses took place, I found Joan and Georgia waiting behind one of the fat azalea bushes for me. I smiled and said:

'All right.'

Georgia cried, 'Wonderful'.

In the light of the house, I could see Joan blush; even her skull, it seemed to me, turned pink, glowing through the fine blond hair. I said:

'I'll come by for you at eight.'

'I've got to be back here at eleven-thirty,' she stammered.

'I know,' I said wryly. 'Harry told me.'

She blushed again, and more or less hid behind Georgia.

'I'm really delighted,' I said, feeling kindly. 'We'll have a fine time.'

'I don't dance very well,' she said.

'I'm the world's worst.'

'Oh . . . fine then,' she got out, and turned and ran, disappearing quickly into the shadows by the house. I didn't care. I seized Georgia and kissed her roughly for her mischief.

Though we worked only half-days Saturday, it had been a tough half-day that morning, with a boxcar load to be finished, the other molding machine like mine out of order, and the foreman just behind me all the time. I was exhausted. I swam, and read and had supper, and got myself into the car reluctantly. Only the thought of helping the youngster throw off her chains sustained my interest; I wondered, starting the motor, if there would be anyone else at Yaeckle's who would dance with her. Georgia's date, I supposed; and a friend I'd made at work, a college boy like myself whose name was Barney.

At least I'd be through early. We'd have to leave by eleven at the latest, perhaps even by ten-thirty if I could persuade her it was

a long drive home. I sighed. I put the car into gear, and drove around to the Collins' driveway.

It was a very composed looking girl who waited for me on the porch, rather becomingly dressed and wearing a pair of Georgia's silk stockings; I knew they must be Georgia's because I knew Joan had none of her own. She sat very still and smiled tentatively when I said hello. When she got up, I saw that the appearance of composure was a trick of twilight; she was trembling.

'Easy does it,' I said softly, taking her arm at the elbow to help her down the stairs. 'It's only a date.'

From somewhere I heard the characteristic giggle of the younger sister, Margaret, and realized that she must be watching us go off. I was surprised not to have the Collinses there, to say good evening to, and wondered if they were watching, too.

'Should we say goodnight to anyone?' I asked.

'Oh no,' she whispered. 'He's listening to the war news. Do let's go.' Then, as we went off across the soft grass: 'I didn't want him to see . . . the stockings.'

'They look great,' I whispered.

We fled.

I had driven fast, at escape speed, for half a mile, when Joan asked me if I had a match.

'Sure,' I said, getting one out. 'Want a cigarette to go with it?'

'Oh no . . . yes, please,' she said. 'That wasn't what I meant. I mean, would you stop the car?' I pulled to the edge of the road, stopped, and turned to look at her. It occurred to me that nervousness might be making her feel ill; I was quite wrong. 'I mean,' she said. 'Georgia lent me this.' In her hand she showed me a little tube of lipstick, and a compact.

I turned on the inside light. 'That'll be better than matchlight,' I said. She was blushing again, that top of the head blush of hers.

I watched her open the compact and the lipstick tube. 'Don't watch, please,' she asked. I looked away.

'This the first time you've had it on?' I asked, after a moment.

First she said, 'Mmmmmm'. Then she said: 'We were practising this afternoon.'

'Never before?'

'Never before. Do you know . . .' There was another little pause. 'When I came off the boat, I was wearing a long skirt and cotton stockings. That's what we wore.'

'No kidding?' I lit myself a cigarette, and continued to look

out across the dark road. The slight, excited sense of evasion and possible pursuit had left me; it hadn't been ever real but it had given the beginning of the evening a certain tone. Remembering that she had said both no and yes to my offer of a cigarette, I now asked again if she wanted one. Silence answered me, then the click of the compact closing.

'Perhaps a bit later,' she said.

'Shall I look, now?'

'Yes, please.'

I turned. The transformation was hardly startling; it was only little Joan, wearing lipstick, nicely, rather minimally put on.

'You look wonderful,' I said, and remembered to smile.

She sat very still, looking at me. 'Do you really think so?'

I nodded. 'Just fine.' I switched off the interior light and started the car.

As we pulled onto the road again, she said in half-voice: 'I think I would like a cigarette now, please.'

Good God, I thought, as I handed one to her, Georgia's been telling her how fast I am; the girl expected to be kissed. Of course. Smoking is what you do when you *don't* want to be kissed; the cigarette as the break in necking. I began to feel a great annoyance with Georgia, with the strict and complex rules of dating and necking to which such girls adhered which, though I did not feel myself bound to them, I had not hesitated to use to my advantage. For Georgia to have instructed this unpracticed Joan in such matters seemed a kind of corruption. Why then, I thought indignantly, hadn't Georgia implanted the doctrine of 'Never let a boy kiss you on the first date?' I knew the answer; every rule had its footnotes. 'If the boy is fast, he won't stand for it.' I felt a little revolted.

'First cigarette?' I asked.

'No we . . . we sneaked some in St. Augustine.'

'Don't British girls go out at all?' I asked.

'Not until one is eighteen,' she said. 'And then . . . well, not on dates exactly. We go to dances and parties. Of course, we go to the dances as little girls, too, but just to watch for a bit. I mean if the dance is at one's own house. But we don't really date boys, I mean, go to places. We're just . . . well, introduced. And then, the year one comes out, there are many wonderful parties and at the end, one generally marries.'

'That's what you'd have done?' I asked.

'I . . . I suppose so.'

'Are you sorry?'

'I suppose so.'

'But it won't keep you from enjoying yourself in America?'

'Oh no,' she said, quickly.

'You look fine. No one will know it's your first date.'

'Oh, thank you,' she said.

I stopped the car at Yaekle's. I wondered, but only out of a sense of benevolence, if I ought to make up my earlier omission. But I didn't want to kiss Joan especially, and I saw, with relief, that it was no longer expected.

I opened the door for her, and we went inside.

It wasn't a bad evening. My friend Barney was there, pretty much the king of local youth, a thin, dynamic, ingratiating boy with a career in politics predicted for him. Barney and his date sat with us; so did Georgia and hers. I looked Georgia's date over pretty carefully and decided that Georgia could do better and decided that she knew it.

I drank beer. Joan asked for gingerale.

'Harry would die on the spot if he thought I'd had anything like beer.'

I agreed; he probably would. Barney, who had known the Collinses for years, did an imitation of Harry's presumable reaction; it was pretty funny.

We traded around dances, and Joan did very well. She was naturally graceful and had a good sense of time. She confessed, now, that she had done some dancing, to a gramophone, with her sister and other girls. I can't remember what the tune was, how the conversation went, during Joan's very first dance with a man; with me; I wonder if she does?

Chiefly, I was glad the others were there. Every third or fourth record, I got to take a rhythmic wiggle around the floor with Georgia; we were at the point of my considering whether to signal the beginning of a real effort to cut her steady out, and her considering whether to encourage it.

I do remember, now that recollection pulls that evening towards me through the kind haze and terrible shimmer of things done, things heard, life lived, in eighteen following years – I do remember the last dance with Joan, just before we left the others to go home. There was a record playing, a slow South American tango, rather melancholy; I can't name it, but I can hum it easily

enough. Reeds had the melody at first, and then a trumpet came in. It was while Joan and I were dancing to it I became aware that I wouldn't mind kissing this girl after all.

So we left early, no longer because I wanted an extra half hour for sleeping but because now I didn't want to have to rush her to the Collins' door; now I fretted and imagined I had messed things up by not kissing her earlier. She was in a lyrical mood; she had had a lovely time, she kept humming that little tango thing, she laughed delightedly at the things I said, and when we turned into the concealment of the Collins' driveway I was no longer fretting. I turned out the headlights, braked, cut the engine, and put my arm around her shoulders. She came against me, awkward and enthusiastic, then started trembling again; I stroked her arm for a moment, pressed my cheek against her head. Then I kissed her.

But the first kiss – again, it is her memory if anyone's; it is not mine. What I recall is that we were cramped in the car, a closed coupe, and that I said: 'I wish there were somewhere more comfortable we could go.'

'The boathouse,' Joan whispered, without an instant's pause.

We slipped down to the boathouse; there was an outdoor chaise there; we sat on it, and kissed again, and I made the next move in the necking ritual. Georgia had done her work badly. She had forgotten, apparently, to say that there was a next move, to specify what a nice girl's behaviour was to be; for Joan more than submitted. My hand had barely touched her before she fell back in my arms, face glowing with moonlight, eyes closed, breathing deeply – ready for anything and leaving direction up to me.

I was awed; I was even a little dismayed. Confused by such success, I moved my hand away, and pulled her upright against me.

'You don't know what you're doing, do you?' I whispered.

'Oh yes. Whatever you say,' she whispered back, breathlessly.

I wouldn't take yes for an answer. 'I can't . . . take advantage . . . ' I said, and things like that, a long, unreasoned string of them, ending illogically: 'I love you, though.'

'Oh, I love you, Quince,' she said. 'I always have.'

The next three weeks were very beautiful and tender and obscurely sad. Not simple; not at all simple.

For I could not decide as we met, slipping away as if casually from Moonstone or the Collinses – for Harry had withdrawn his

sanction of dates for Joan, out of hand – I could not decide whether Joan and I should love as children or as adults, whether in the mode of her straining innocence or my hesitant experience, complete now, if scant, for something over a year. The choice of modes was mine to make, but I could not make it. All I felt certain of was that there were only two choices for us, two ways of love, the child's and the adult's, and if Joan was more than the former, I was less than the latter; yet the third way, the teen-age way that Georgia represented, that I'd played at with her, seemed not a choice at all for Joan and me. What I felt for Joan I could not have felt within the footling rules and demeaning customs of adolescent courtship: the exchange of pledges, parody of fidelity, restriction of the male, burlesque reformation of his habits, until he became, for the circumscribed satisfaction of his lusts, that foolish and unmanly schoolboy figure, the little husband.

Georgia, according to the system, would have been a challenge; Joan, outside the system and unspoiled by it, was a trust. Was it not her radiant submissiveness that I loved most of all? In lunch hour at the sawmill, I would talk about my problem of decision with Barney, who knew better than to give advice. And, of course – I wonder if I need to say it? – I never did take Joan's yes for an answer. Yet all lovers are teachers. When they cannot teach well, they teach badly; so I instructed her in reservation, holding back, temporizing and denial – a lover's subject matter is himself, and I taught Joan my own confusion.

Harry Collins, and with reason enough, became more and more suspicious. Our chances for meeting became fewer and, of course, it made our feeling more intense. We took to meeting very early in the morning, swimming to meet one another in the river before I left for work, kissing in the water in the sunrise while adults slept, with the taste of toothpaste in our mouths and the buoyancy making close embrace too insubstantial to be physically exciting. My acquatic romance. My beautiful, floating, sunrise love in the water. Yes, there is no difficulty in remembering that.

We were circumspect when we could be, direct when we couldn't. There were evenings when I called formally at the Collins' house, when Joan and I sat stiffly on the sofa, side by side, holding hands under a photograph album or an English magazine. Sometimes she was homesick; once or twice she talked about the war. She had seen, this little girl, enemy planes, heard bombs fall. And I was close to Harry Collins, then, for I felt excited and

ashamed, ashamed that I was where I was, not over there, protecting her.

For less public meetings, we had two accomplices, Georgia and the younger sister, Margaret, carrying notes, arranging trysts. It was, after all, a fine way to be in love. The difficulties were exhilarating, the rewards, when we finally managed, now and then, to be alone, tremendous. And water was our element, always the river; even, once, the ocean.

There was a Sunday swimming expedition to St. Augustine, an obligatory visit to the aunt; Harry Collins, who did not require himself to be consistent, drafted me once again for driving, and I went off with all the girls and Naomi, too. There was early supper, there were even games afterwards – it seems to me some other local boys were there; and finally, there was swimming in the moonlight from the beach, and Joan and I swam way, way out. We both swam well; she wore no bathing cap. If you would be with me on that evening, swim under water and see this (you must keep your eyes open; this gentle, sparkling water, clear as the night air over its bright sand bottom, will not sting): it is Joan swimming beside us under water, sidestroking, turning towards us as she swims; she is wearing a suit but does not seem to be, for the silhouette, light against dark water, is all of the same pallor; its edges, all around, are light; the little phosphorescents cling as if they loved her, too, luminous without heat; see, see how they glitter on her breast, her arms, see how they glisten, linger and then fall away from the strands of her flowing hair.

The next morning, Monday, I arrived at work, my mind awash with images of marine beauty, to find the mill hot and my fellow workers talking strike. Conditions at the sawmill were murderous. Most of the machines were obsolete. The week before, an old employee had cut his hand off with a power saw, something wrong with the safety device; a company doctor had dissuaded him by threats from filing for damages – something, Barney and I supposed, about the relationship between equipment quality and insurance rates. The pay was miserable, the hours brutal; as for sanitation, there was running water, but only in the office. In the shed, we had to drink from buckets, used open pit latrines, and could not wash ourselves except at home. Yet none of these things was at issue; what had brought the indoor hands to such a pitch of unorganized indignation was something quite different. They had learned that some of the negroes, who worked out in the yard,

were being paid 35 cents an hour, while we got 32. They were furious. Haphazardly, without leadership, they passed the word around: when the machines were turned off at lunchtime, we would all go out, eat our lunches, and sit there on the banks beside the road instead of returning and turning the machines back on.

Barney and I met over our sandwiches, sitting a little apart from the others at first, and talked it over tensely.

'It's a lousy strike, for a lousy reason,' I said, but that was not the only falseness in our position; the fact was that we had our jobs as favors from the management, college boys who had been done a good turn by being given summer jobs at which we were not really terribly efficient.

I remember Barney saying: 'Damn it, Quince, I've believed in strikes and labor all my life.'

I said: 'It's about the only thing I've always been sure I was for.'

'But it's . . . why couldn't we be in a good strike, about something real?'

'I'll feel bad joining it,' I said.

'We'd feel worse if we didn't.'

I nodded. We were depression boys, whatever our class. To strike, to act heroically for labor, was a daydream of the times, as powerful an aspiration as valor in combat, prowess in athletics, brilliance in reply. Our strike was here, now, yet we had no strength to lend it, and so to join it was defeat. We were not ready. We did not have the experience, the convictions, the eloquence to rise and go among the men, persuading them to revise their motives and amend their technique. We merely moved with the others.

It was a stupid way we struck, sitting anxiously on the bank, muttering. Charlie, the jovial foreman, stepped out of the shed and blew his whistle, signaling the end of lunch hour.

'Come on,' he cried happily. 'Let's get in here and get these belts moving.'

We all sat still and looked at him.

He stepped toward us, puzzlement showing on his face. 'Come on, boys,' he said. 'Lunch hour's all gone.'

'We ain't going back, Charlie,' a man named Cooney said.

'What you talking about?'

'This here's a strike,' said somebody else, uncomfortably.

'What for? What's wrong with you all? Come on you, Joe.'

Charlie, who had reached us, slapped a special friend of his on the shoulder. 'Stop crapping old Charlie and let's get them belts moving.'

'They ain't crapping,' Joe said.

'This here's a strike,' Cooney repeated.

Charlie drew back and looked slowly at us, his eyes swinging from face to face, stopping a moment at me and Barney, moving on.

Then he got mad. 'Lookie you all,' he said. 'I ain't going to talk to you about this. There's nothing to talk about. You want to sit there on your asses, sit there. I'll get the trucks and have enough niggers here in half an hour so we won't never need any one of you again. You hear me?' There was some uneasy stirring. 'Now I'm turning my back,' he said. 'I'm starting for the office to order those trucks. God help you if I get to that office. God help you if I don't hear them machines snapping on before I get to that office door. I don't want to see who turns them on. I don't want to see who's the last back in there, either. But I know damn well somebody'd better start pushing turn-on buttons, or there's going to be some hungry kids and women in this town tomorrow night.'

I'd forgotten. The next day was payday. They'd called their strike the day before their money was due, the day when everyone was broke and weekly store credit stretched thin, credit in stores owned by men who would side with the mill. Charlie turned away. He started toward the office. He wasn't moving slowly, either. Men started to speak.

'What do we do, Barney?' I asked. He shook his head, and we sat still there, for a moment. Then I got uneasily to my feet; I ought to have kept still, I suppose, unless I was ready to try to move them with courageous speech, to call for decency of motive, organization, a strong fight for honorable goals. It wasn't in me; all I could do was move over to the man Charlie had touched, Joe.

'It's crap, Joe,' I said, but with no great dignity, more in the tone of barroom argument. 'They can't fire a man for striking. That's the law. Can't hold his money back, either. That's law too.'

'I know it,' Joe muttered. 'But do they know it?'

'They're the law,' someone else said.

The man named Cooney came up beside us. 'We're sticking it, ain't we?' he shouted, full of spirit. 'Long as we're out here and they got them orders to fill, they need our ass worse than they need the niggers. Ain't that right? Minute we go back inside that shed, they got it all again and we got nothing.'

'Yeah.'

I don't know what Barney and the others were saying, but there were a dozen of us arguing in our different ways for staying out. No one was taking the other side, however, so perhaps our words were not argument; perhaps they were merely bluster. While we talked thus, Charlie reached the office. I saw him turn, in front of the door, look at us and go in.

Should we have marched away, appointed pickets, a committee, forged a platform? Ideas like these occur to me now; then all I did was sit back down by Barney.

'Maybe we'll win,' I said, letting myself get excited. 'Barney, maybe we'll win.'

He looked at his watch. 'Well, we're still out,' he said. 'We've been out twenty minutes, and we're still out.'

Charlie came hustling down the stairs, now; with him was his brother, foreman of the outside yard, in which work, with the colored help, was going on as usual. We watched the two stride toward us, and we all braced. They came to the other edge of the hot road along whose bank we sat, turned down it and started past us. They were heading for the sheds; they didn't look at us. But just as Charlie got even with the last man in our group, he shouted back over his shoulder.

'The office wants to be decent. They'll meet you Saturday after work, you hear me? You come on to work now, and nobody'll get docked.'

No one got up. Charlie and his brother walked on. Just as they got to the shed entrance, Charlie called again: 'You hear me? The ones come in now don't get docked. You've lost an hour. Can you afford it? Any son of a bitch who can afford it, don't need a job.'

And he and his brother went on into the mill where we heard, in a minute, a hum start. The hum became a clatter. They were turning on the machines themselves.

They turned them all on, saws and molders, planers, sanders, everything that made a noise, so that, sitting by the sheds, as we were, we could no longer hear each other talk.

'Don't go in now,' I was crying, to nobody, not even to Barney; to myself. 'They're giving in to us, they're giving in . . .' How many drowned cries from how many parched throats went into that noise as mine did? We were all on our feet, surrounded by the enemy, sound; communications cut. But it was more than that;

the noise drew us. Our feet moved, though we held back against them. The call of the machines to us to come and mate our work with theirs was aphrodisiac.

We moved around. We hit each other on the arms, the backs, and gestured; each man felt, perhaps, that we could win, but none was sure that any other knew it. Then I saw Charlie and his brother come out, and speak to one man, draw him aside, shout into his ear; they brought another over to where he was standing, waiting for them, and the sun baked us as we watched. The shed, with its ovenlike shade, its expectation of our sweat, looked almost inviting. Another man joined Charlie's group, and then another. Charlie and his brother spoke urgently to them, and I knew that we were going to lose. I could see the men getting ready. A fifth man, Joe, the one I'd spoken to myself, joined the group of his own accord. Cooney shouted, somewhere near my own ear:

'Might as well see what they're saying,' and went, not waiting for my answer.

And the group, Cooney included, started then, and headed into the shed. Charlie turned and beckoned to us all. Most of the others got up. The rest of us looked uneasily at one another. Several broke for the shed at a run. Gradually, we all followed, and the strike was over.

Barney and I were the last ones in.

Charlie didn't catch up with me until the machines were turned off at quitting time. I expected something rough; perhaps I was not man enough to deserve roughness, for all he said was:

'I expected something better, after what we done for you all.'

When I got home, I had to answer Mother's questions about the strike, news of which had traveled out from town. I broke away, put on my swimming trunks, and was floating in the river with my eyes closed – closing them seemed, somehow, to rest my ears – so that I didn't see Georgia coming along the bank. When I opened my eyes, she was standing right at the river's edge, beckoning. I swam slowly toward her, expecting some sort of note from Joan. As I swam in, Georgia slipped off her sandals and came wading out to meet me. She was wearing a wide black skirt, with figures on it of some sort, and she gathered this garment around her pretty legs and hitched it up, to keep it from the water as she came. Then she stopped, and I swam on toward her, enjoying the sight, wondering, almost, why I had wanted to look any further than this for my summer emotion.

'Don't come over tonight,' she said. 'Harry's so mad he could kill you.'

'He is?' I stood up, dripping, in the water. 'What for?'

'Wasn't there some trouble at work?'

'A strike,' I said, stupidly. 'So-called. You heard about it?'

'Yes, and so did Harry and knows you were in it, and Barney too.'

Suddenly I understood. Of course, Harry was furious; I was so many kinds of traitor to him now. Traitor to class, traitor to war effort; saboteur, blackguard.

'He's forbidden the girls to speak to you,' Georgia said. 'And Joan cried, so he's sending them back to St. Augustine tomorrow, and Joan says you mustn't try to see her tonight but please write to her there, only we'll put it in an envelope and I'll address it so they'll think the letter's from me.'

Things were never any good for Joan and me after she left. I wrote immediately, as directed, a letter that was passionate but not quite sincere; I cannot be sure of the reason for my insincerity – most likely it was that sight of Georgia wading toward me with her skirt pulled up. Joan replied, agreeing to the method I'd suggested for our meeting in St. Augustine, but her letter lacked conviction, too. I drove over that weekend; we met as arranged, and went off together quite alone in the car.

The strike matter seemed to bother her, hurt her perhaps, but she didn't want to talk about it. I think she felt, with Harry, that I had acted in a way that damaged her country; I'm not sure. There was something else on her mind that was far more dismaying to me, less arguable, with more power to wound. She had begun, already, to see other American girls her age – not allies, like Georgia, but a group, competitive as girls are, a group to whom she was not someone to whom to teach the application of lipstick but rather a girl like themselves, cute, regular, involved in some sort of boy trouble.

I knew about it when I kissed her and she drew away.

'Can a girl who necks keep a boy's respect?' she asked seriously. 'What do you think about that?'

It was the voice of the American teen-ager.

I think the same spell that had been broken for me by the sight of a wading girl must have been broken for her by the incomprehensible news of my bad political behavior. Under spells we are changeless; when they break, a whole accumulation of change

takes place, and now I was appalled at Joan. I was even more appalled at myself, for I knew where to put the blame. There is an innocence more fragile and more valuable than the physical which my clumsy teaching, taking its delayed effect, destroyed in Joan.

We didn't see one another again. By Christmas of that year, America was at war. I went down to Moonstone, for the last time, at Christmas vacation; my brothers were there, all of us conscious, none of us saying, that it was unlikely we should be together when Christmas came again.

The English girls were not around; they were at school in North Carolina. Georgia and her mother had gone home, wherever home was, for Georgia's father, the National Guard Colonel, was already out in the Pacific. Naomi Collins came to the house to say hello, and I understood that Harry did not wish to see me.

Hong Kong fell on Christmas day. Mother, coming back from a visit to the Collinses in the afternoon, said that Harry had been stricken physically at the news.

It seemed to me that I should go and ask to see him, now, so I called on the old man, and was admitted to the room where he lay, no longer florid, wasting in bed, and nothing bristled now except the white mustache which seemed to belong on some other face.

He didn't seem displeased to see me after all. 'You'll be going over now, Quince,' he said.

'I suppose so, sir.'

He made an effort to get his hand up, and I understood, after a moment, that I was to shake it.

I had hardly gotten back to college when a note came from my mother, saying Harry Collins had died. And it was that, not the more surprising news, in the same letter, of Joan's engagement, that made me sad.

A Poem about the Red Paint People

by Samuel French Morse

Unfit for house or pasturage
But white with meadowsweet and haze,
This barren spot was sacred ground
When Sieur de Monts put in to shore
One of those windless August days
The sails fell idle for a sign
From God that he had come to found
The one true faith upon this rock;
Though like a soldier he must claim
The land for an ambitious king
So cold in his apostasy
He could not bless it. Oak and pine
And roses grew high up the slope
Above the naked outcrop where
The starving yellow hawkweed spread
In soil too thin to plant the cross,
If not the heavy sword he bore.
But other men had quarried here
Ten thousand years ago, and left,
In stiff repose, a hunter dead
Some weeks' hard travel from the place
Their own great gods inhabited –
Too long a journey for the soul.
The shaman smeared the body red
With ocher; then he filled the mouth,
Closed up the passage in the ears
And nostrils, set the fallen spear
Within the spirit's reach, and turned
The sealed eyes backward in the head.
Like any priest, he must have said
Some words to give the living pause
And keep the covert fox away.
Perhaps he gave the place a name,
Or left a mark the weather wore
As smooth as water long before
The Abenaki settled here.
But who they were and where they went
No Indian or white man knows,
Whose own untoward and bitter wars
Are shell heaps now and broken adze,
Not someone's half-remembered lies.

Whatever chance it was that kept
The shallow grave inviolate
So long, was all that laid it waste
One morning when a road crew turned
The thin soil over, and there burned
A moment in the summer sun's
Noon heat, the painted skeleton:
A moment only, while the air
Blazed into spirit, quick with rust.
Beyond all time and mere disguise
The body seemed, that was but dust,
A little handful of red bone
Outlasting any name we know
For men who kept a vigil here
Before our history began.
And who shall say what we have done?

Poems by Jesse Hill Ford

FIRST LOVERS

I had the best of you,
And you the best of me.
And no regrets,
For we
Were each the other's
First, oh fresh and sweet!

Before the sour years;
Before embittered –
Before God died;
Before: by luck or art –
Before too late,
We found the sense to hate,
And parted: hostile, gracious
Enemies.

HELL, I KNOW

If anybody would say to me what hell is,
Hell, I'd know and what I'd tell is:
Hell, it's you forget
and can't remember.
You can't remember over again
with nobody else,
Some girl you knew once, some girl you loved.

It won't come back how true and hell, how good
it was.
And hell, you say the next world – hell,
It couldn't be no worse
Than this one is.

Poems by Barbara Guest

SADNESS

We were walking down a narrow street.
It was late autumn. In my hotel room
the steam heat had been turned on. In the office
buildings, in the boutiques, coal was lit.

That morning I had been standing at the window
looking out on the Tuileries. I had been crying
because the yellow tulips were gone and all the children
were wearing thin coats. I felt an embarrassing pain
distributed over my arms which were powerless
to order the leaves to blossom or the old women
on the stairs to buy shoes to cover their feet.

Then you took my hand. You told me that love
was a sudden disturbance of the nerve ends
that startled the fibres and made them new

again. You quoted a song about a man running
by the sea who drew into his lungs the air
that had several times been around the world.

A speck of coal dust floated down and settled on my lapel.
Quickly with your free hand you rubbed out the spot.
Yet do you know I shall carry always
that blemish on my breast?

JAFFA JUICE

This orange bric-a-brac has a paper luster
very decadent.
Crossing Hyde Park I am brimming
with sad thoughts of the Royal Bank of Scotland
when the shepherd calls to his sheep
and daylight crisps my hands in streaks.
The primroses are lying in thin groups of threes
transparent as the fool's stammer
when the old king came storming to his pool
and vagabonds clustered
to the guard's hall
hoping to see
a burning palace. Then the family
sat down to tea.
There's a lady in a macintosh
trying to climb a wall. Her tears
her broken tears,
more fabulous for their tumult caused
(by moonlight assembling pears,
a Jericho harp for the guests)
she has heard the museum mating chairs,
seen the varnished fragments of the bomb
meeting in a closer circle.
Reginald after the battle!
What a cry for a miner, alas he's lost
his keys and can't locate the platter.
The silver cooking geese have left the plain,
no one shoves the tin

My darling
Weymouth sands are green
there's drought in the wind
there's ash in our eye
the poor dead hands are clean
Sing derry down
the hospital shakes its leaves
For the players
and their laughing daughters, the morning is bright
upon the square, the air shows its face
like a powdered Indian, the fog
is braced with sun; over the silver
setting hey-day toasts there's a ring of moon
for tomorrow.
A crown lies under
the cake. They're borrowing streamers
for the race and white candles with tartan crests
burn in the cellars below the streets. The Crescent
has an Egyptian hue. Everyone is civil.
Buns in the oven, cider in the hall,
pleasant, sings our land.
Who frets above the stair with sour eye in glove?
Is it the Marvellous Boy? Someone crept from a grove?
Who carries the axe with sharpened blade,
not that wraith of laureates under the hill?
The prisoner or the emigrant horde?
Ho for the emigrant's song!
'In this autumn's double grace from war
I watch the housefronting plummets of cream
wear echoes of sinks
and banners of choice portals
when I ride my sorrel to Marble Arch
praying for the liquidating
skin to melt
into a victory column
built like a ship
bonded for New Plymouth where my fortune
(folios of bent seed)
will take root on the first wave
will take root'

Trees

Mistress in her own Home

by Kimon Lolos

An hour's road from Aex there was Argon where the river was wide and still like a swamp. There Katina's brothers shot ducks to sell to the well-to-do families of Aex. Her folks ate corn-bread, beans, and hot red peppers everyday and, once a month, meat.

At fifteen she was given to the family of a gendarmerie officer. The officer was transferred every two years, and she saw Thessaly, Peloponnesos, the Seven Islands, the Cyclades. She scrubbed every house they moved into, fed and washed the three children, stayed up all night when they had the whooping cough, the measles, the chickenpox.

She put the poor little drachmas of her salary in the Post Office Savings and kept the account book on the ledges of masonry funnels above fuming charcoal pits and wood stoves. When the pages turned tan from the smoke and the corners crumbled, she was as yellow and crumbly – she was sick. And she was twenty-five. She returned to Argon, rested, fattened a little. But even if all of her skimpy savings had not been used up for drugs and food, she still would have left Argon eventually just the same. Because now, to her, the village was too much to take. She had seen the outer world, the scrubbed, neat, quick-eyed seamen on the boats, the uniformed conductors and brakemen on the trains. She would not want to marry a cornfield teamster whose breath was bad from hunger and his one-room house stood above the ox stable and you could hear the smell of manure through the gaps of the shrunken boards of the floor.

So she entered the Constantine family and was happy and healthy again. At first she thought the wood-and-charcoal fellow on National Defense Street was going to propose. When he came to deliver, one December evening, she held up the kerosene lamp for him, for they had no electricity in the basement. There had been lots of preliminaries between the two for the past ten months – and this was the beginning of her second year with the Constantines. She was now used to his glances and his little flatteries. So now he took her hand, and she let him kiss her cheek. When he went for a real kiss on the mouth, she stopped him:

'Dost thou love me?'

'Sure I do!' His eyes dark like his charcoal, and burning.

'Well?'

He knew she meant wasn't he going to talk to her master? He spoke hastily:

'I will, I will, soon. Let me kiss thee.'

'No,' she said and all the time she longed for his full mouth and his glistening black hair.

He rubbed his nose, sighed, collected his empty burlaps.

'Thou art difficult,' he said, 'God thou art difficult, tsk, tsk.'

'Must I not be forsooth?'

'In the name of God and the All-Holy Mary . . .'

He looked up and saw the gleam of hurt virtue in her eyes. He gave up. He left. That was it.

Then there was the butcher who delivered meat twice a week. Then the fruitman. Then the mailman. And the house painter. They all tried to steal kisses on the dark stairway or behind the heavy outer door. Then there was nobody. For years.

The Constantine boys were now young fellows. The elder had just entered the Evelpidon Military Academy, and the other one was going to go to the University of Salonika, next year. Mr. Constantine decided to have a new water pump and a bigger tank above the sink. They summoned mastro-Yannis Tekezis. The job took him a week. Ten days after, he came all dressed up in his black Sunday suit and talked to her master. It was a formal proposal. Mr. Constantine said yes, because he knew the man. And he called her mistress in and Mrs. Constantine said, 'Why yes,' too. He was fiftyish, yes, a little barrel-chested, a little breathy, thin-legged. But he was as reliable as a government bond. His little shop behind the Fish Market Square had a reputation.

When Katina was done with the lunch dishes, they broke the news to her, and her mistress kissed her on the cheek and was excited. Katina said:

'Thank you, mistress.' But her face could not be read.

'We will talk it over,' said Mrs. Constantine.

It was Katina's afternoon off. She fetched Olga across National Defense Street and they took a walk along the paved Avenue of the Acacias, then along the river, upstream. They sat on a bench at the Great Planetree Grove by the old bridge that spanned the water like a stone rainbow. They watched the Sunday promenaders and cracked roasted pumpkin seeds with their front teeth. Katina was not there. She cracked the shells, absentminded, crushed and lost most of the seeds.

In the evening she said:

'No, mistress, I'm sorry, mistress, I do not want him, mistress.' And she whined a little, just a little.

Mrs. Constantine scanned Katina's figure that was getting a

little pillowy at the stomach and a little lardy at the back where the brassiere cut into the flesh. Then she looked at the suggestion of gray at Katina's temples.

'Thou art not a tendril thyself,' said Mrs. Constantine. 'Thou art thirty-five.'

'He is too old,' Katina pleaded. 'He is fifty. Besides . . . he does not draw me.' She looked down and blushed.

'Now listen to me. Dost thou know that this is thy last chance? People do not marry for looks or youth – they marry for company, rest, and security.'

'Why, I am not looking for a fancy-dandy, God guard me, mistress!'

'Listen to *me*! Thou wantest to be a maidservant for the rest of thy life? Ah! One would expect *me* to discourage thee, since the house needs thee. But *because* thou art one of the family – oh I see I will have to spank thee to show my concern. Art thou well, or dost thou want me to holler? Dost thou not forsooth want to feel a little silk on thy behind and be thy own mistress in thy own home?'

'You do not want me anymore, mistress?'

'I dare I will spank thee after all. Put some knowledge in thy Argon wooded head, woman! *He* is not just anybody. He is mastro-Yannis Tekezis by name, and the whole of Aex knows him for his steady hand with pipes and irons. Dost thou not know?'

Katina nodded.

'Well?' her mistress demanded. 'Good business in the shop and extra jobs with the two clinics and the Municipal Hospital and with the 1st and 2nd Elementaries. And he is a nice gentle man who goes from home to work and from work back home and will not step even on an ant.'

'He is a widower, he is too old, mistress,' Katina implored.

Mrs. Constantine nailed Katina with a stiff glance and Katina was uncomfortable and shifted and pivoted in the kitchen chair, throwing her elbows on the back of the chair and her forehead on the crook of her arm. She had a spell of soft sobs. She wished the plumber had never come to put in a new pump and a bigger tank, which took him a whole week while she was cooking and fussing and he was in her way with his pipes and wrenches. She sobbed because her mistress was right: she had no choice. Why, why, she thought through her sobs, did the plumber not come ten years

earlier when he was and looked younger and she would not have minded the difference in their ages? Why?

* * *

Katina and mastro-Yannis married in the St. Eleoussa chapel on the other side of the walled court of the 1st Elementary. After the ceremony, they crossed the schoolyard followed by the priest, the best man and three friends of the groom and their wives. His two-room house was just on this side of the school. They offered the guests Turkish delights, roasted or sugar coated chick peas, and uzo to drink.

Their wedding night was a failure. Not that he was hasty or rough or clumsy. Not he. And yet they failed because she let him do the whole job alone and she only lay there useless as a clogged water main. He coped with her dead weight, prudent and all the way considerate. But no knowledge of levering and angling could thaw and unclog her. Her body remained stony, dry, forbidding – although she did not mean to – like a stubborn soulless thing that does not know better and refuses to go along with Man.

He gave up in due time, which was just like him who was gentle and patient with the tempers of materials and knew that only easy does it and there is always another time for tackling a job. And he did not blame her a drop either. In fact, he apologized for having tortured her, so to speak. And he pulled over the cover and for a moment put his heavy swollen-like palms on her shoulders, reassuring. His hands were wild rough, scarred, and yet tender in their touch, and knowing.

He kissed her on the forehead and let her have the biggest share of the bed. He smoked a cigarette and in half an hour was asleep. She heard his difficult breathing because of his sinus condition, and she thought of his gentleness and of his sage and careful hands that fixed things to last. In the dark, with her eyes wide open, she was guilty but there was nothing she could do, she thought. She only lay awake listening to the night wind shake the brush on the edge of the cliff where Aex sat like a mistress on a green balcony. And she thought of the height from the eyebrow of Aex's terrace down to the bottom of the valley below, and how easy it would be to leap and vanish into the *Eon of Eons, Amen.*

Next day, while her husband was at work, she ran away. To her mistress. She fell in Mrs. Constantine's arms and gasped:

'I can't, I can't, mistress!'

There was soothing and advice, sermon and scolding, and then again motherly threats of spanking her and splitting her Argon wooded head to wedge a piece of knowledge into it. Finally her mistress made her promise she would try to be a good wife *to the gentle and nice man no matter what.* And she repeated the promise to herself when she got home and in a pang of remorse put herself to cooking a good supper for him.

At night, in bed, mastro-Yannis tried again. But now she helped him a little with her body but mostly with her new disposition to please him. He was moved, grateful, and he loved her. But nothing happened in the end – she did not know why – he was puzzled.

'I'm sorry, Katina,' he apologized like the night before.

'Oh it is my fault.'

'No, no. Blame not thyself. We shall see.'

When they went to the doctor she was ashamed and sick to her stomach. But the doctor was friendly and smiling and the examination behind the partition was quick.

'This is nothing,' said the doctor to her husband afterwards. 'It is just – nothing wrong with the bones et cetera, understand? She is a little . . . well, tough, that is all. It happens sometimes. Now then all we need is a very simple incision.'

'Operation?'

'In the name of God, mastro-Yannis, do not call it an operation! It is no more than making a little cut on a leather washer to ease it on the faucet stopper.'

Katina blushed and looked down and she did not look up even when her husband asked her opinion:

'Katina?'

She nodded. And the doctor made ready.

* * *

The second week her husband asked her:

'Didst thou . . . ?'

'What?'

'Thou knowest . . . like me . . .'

'Worry not thyself for me.'

'Now, now, please. It is very important, you know. I know a little more. Didst thou?'

'Yes . . . it seems to me . . . yes.'

'Thou art not sure, art thou?'

'Yes . . . yes . . . I am.'

They both knew she was lying. So every night he was more and more careful and patient and waited for her as long as he could, even longer. He never complained. Not ever.

At daytime, when she was alone, she called herself names that hurt – she wanted them to hurt: if she did not want him at all, she should not have married him at all. As it was now she was only half his wife. She often appeased herself with a: *I am doing my duties anyway*. But in one or two hours she would think of it again and would say: *Yes, thy duty! But art thou . . . art thou honest with the man? Dost thou want him at all? Canst thou say yes, with thy hand on the icon?*

There was a particular day of the month she ached so she wanted to beat her guilty parts for aching and for the other thing: it was all very well for the doctor to have said she was just born like that, too tough in there, and to have slashed with the scalpel. But how did he know that, because she did not want her husband, her body had not stiffened or hardened, or something had not happened to her system? There was that washerwoman Alexandra who came once a month to do the big laundry at the Constantine's. Three times she gave birth on the fifth or sixth month – all dead. Well, some people said it was because her husband was a good for nothing so she did not want anything from him. It can happen.

But when that particular day was over and she felt better, she dismissed her theory altogether. She felt like singing and dancing all morning. She had a good lunch and then sat by the window to knit. In ten minutes she felt heavy, sweetly heavy and she wanted to nap. She went to bed and stretched her body with pleasure. While she was sinking slowly, slowly, slowly, she saw faces and things of past years: the charcoal man and his well drawn lips, then the mailman and his little blond moustache, and others. She was half-asleep by now and did not know what she was doing. Her body stretched more, reaching for something, and she was loose in the joints and everywhere, and relaxed as never before since she married. She felt as though she was in the sun, naked, and her body turned its face to the light like a sunflower and opened to receive the shafts. She went closer to the sun . . . and she woke up and got up to scatter the dream.

Then the days and the nights, the weeks and the months went by. Her husband took her to the cinema every Sunday. They saw adventure or war pictures at the *Hermeion*, and love stories at the *Menandros*. They cracked roasted pumpkin seeds, and he read the

subtitles to her. The sixteenth of every month they celebrated their wedding anniversary. He bought her silken underwear, and once he bought her a silk dress. She told him not to go to such expenses, but he fondled her and took her to the *Olympus* where they ate broiled red snappers from Salonika and drank beer.

By the fourth month she was used to his coming near her almost every night. Sometimes she knew for sure he was doing it just for her. But she did not tell him. Only when she got a chance – whenever she accidentally touched his throbbing heart, or when his breathing was more difficult – she told him he should not strain himself. He kept asking her after:

'Didst thou?'

She did not try to lie to him anymore. And he kept reassuring her:

'Thou wilt, thou wilt . . .' And everytime fondling her and trying to impress on her this was not a rare thing, you know. It could happen to any woman at the beginning of marriage. Till one day, out of nowhere, you know . . .

* * *

A month after the schools opened, a pupil of the 1st Elementary, across the alley from mastro-Yannis's house, called a refugee boy 'a Turk.' He answered back by calling the native 'a Bulgarian'. There was a fight in front of the school's outhouse. They fell against the eaves gutter and burst it at the T joint. Then the November rains came and the gush of rainwater from the gaping seam was blown in by the wind through the doorless entrance. The school summoned mastro-Yannis.

He tilted his ladder against the outhouse, a little more hard of breathing than usual, a little pale and tired as of lately. With slow and sure movements he climbed up carrying his brazier and battery of soldering irons.

He began to wrestle with the burst pipe, to put it and hold it in position. It was a little difficult; he failed twice. He tried again, stretching and bending more. To sustain the effort, he stopped breathing. He now was bending a little more and he felt his blood mounting in his head. And suddenly he heard a sharp whistle go off in his head, like when a safety steam valve blows its cap, and he felt the buzzing bees in his ears, and was dizzy, and the daylight went out.

It wasn't too high, the ladder, and it was soft, the ground, from

the rains. But just the same he lay on the earth for good, like a fallen stone, and his mouth was twisted.

They hurried him home on his ladder, across the schoolyard, across the cobbled alley. The doctor came, revived him, but mastro-Yannis's mouth remained crooked, in a benevolent imbecile smile as though he was in pleasure.

'He had a stroke,' said the doctor to Katina.

She cried only after the ordeal, quietly, after the doctor and neighbors were gone and he was asleep or looked so. Her pity for his slanted mouth and his deeply ploughed forehead cut her insides like a knife. She went to the kitchen-laundry across the little inner court of the house and let her tears go to her heart's content. She thought how fast everything had happened, in six short months . . .

She wiped her wet face with her house apron, sighed and looked out into the court where an old broken drill of her husband's rusted under the leafless vine trellis. It had started to rain again. The hardpacked dirt looked shiny and cold, a bed of glass. She went back to the house. He was still asleep, breathing irregularly through his open, now infantile looking mouth. She sat by the window and saw the wind slant the rain and the rain lash the gate of the schoolyard. It was like a punishment . . .

She turned because she heard him move in the bed. She went near. He was still asleep though. Rest, rest, gentle darling man, she said inside her and suddenly her eyes were foggy again and she bit her quivering lower lip. And in her pity, and in her need to punish herself she decided it was all her fault. If she had even once really convinced him that she felt him, as a man, once, maybe he would not have tried so hard . . . Last night, it was like every night. Only she had thought he had tried a little harder, for her, all concerned with her, the poor man. And today? . . . No use telling herself she couldn't help it. Maybe the stroke would not have come if she was different with him. Maybe.

* * *

They let him out of bed in three weeks, and the doctor said there was nothing more he could do for him. He could drag his feet, first holding onto the bed rail or onto the back of the chair. Later he did not have to hold onto anything. He would take a step with his healthy right leg then drag the other near. And then again the same thing. His left arm was useless. His mouth remained crooked

and at first inarticulate. Later he managed to form one then two syllable words. But no sentences. His eyes were the best talkers. And they were apologetic.

She took care of him like a dedicated nurse, like when she tended the gendarmerie officer's children and the Constantine children in their illnesses. When she had to buckle his belt or make him sit in the shallow tin basin to wash his back, he said:

'Solly. Am solly.'

'I don't want thee to be sorry.'

When they had paid the doctor and later spent all the cash, they covered the second month with what she got from overdue bills. Some of his customers took long to pay. One day he said he should try to go back to the shop and do something, minor jobs. It was impossible. And she said no and she would have said no even if he could work a little. Because now he was her baby. And he wept and rolled the slippery pebbles in his mouth:

'Sell shop, please.'

'No,' she said.

She went to Mr. Constantine and he went around and found young Pandos just out of the army, and convinced him he should have a shop of his own, mastro-Yannis's shop, and not work for the Ritskas like before he was drafted. And there was a deal -- no rent, but cuts for mastro-Yannis.

For a month it was so and so. Then the cuts were smaller and sometimes there were none. Pandos complained that most old customers had gone to Ritskas. This went on for two months. On Sundays or holidays the Constantines sent them eggs or fruit or spinach 'n' cheese pies. Twice they sent them a piece of boiled fresh ham.

By February Katina and mastro-Yannis had an argument – the first and the last in their married life. He struggled with his stubborn consonants to make her understand he did not want her to go out and work.

'No wan' thee be selvan' again. Sell shop.'

'No.'

'Sell house.'

'No.'

She said no, no, no and cried and he cried and she took him in her arms. She felt his boniness, the shrinkage of his stricken body, his smallness. She pressed his head against her bosom and rocked him for awhile: repentance and promise. A silent vow. Forever.

In two weeks she got a job with the prefecture. She woke up at four-thirty every morning, wore his woolen socks over her stockings, bundled herself with his army surplus overcoat and threw a shawl over her head. He opened his all-saying eyes and looked at her in passive protest, every morning. And she tucked the blankets around him and said reassuringly:

'Go thou back to sleep.'

She walked on the cobbled streets, and the northers blowing down from the Yugoslavia way made her quiver. At the Central Market Square she went to the outdoor vendors who stood in the cold by the leafless grandfather of a plane tree and sold their stuff to truck drivers and porters. They knew her by now as a steady customer. She bought herself a cup of hot salep and a bagel, standing by the vendor's brazier for warmth.

Then she walked up the steep street, past the still closed 'Byzantium' coffee shop, and into the prefecture. She went after dust and plaster chips in the decrepit corridors and the stairway of the old building. She scrubbed the entrance hall. She swept the offices, wiped the desks, emptied the ashtrays and the wastepaper baskets. She washed the toilet rooms.

She thought whether she wouldn't be better off if she became a maidservant again with some family. But it wouldn't pay unless she stayed there day and night and ate all her meals there – board and room and clothes being the best part of the deal. Besides, she knew it would make her husband more unhappy than he already was. Besides, she did not want to leave him alone all day. Besides, she would rather be mistress in her own poor home, the owner of a barren shop, than – .

She thought often of it all from all sides. Since fate had so willed, let her at least save the reason for which she had married him. Make the best of her privilege. She did not know how to explain it, but she felt this was an honest way. She was not exactly a servant at the prefecture, not quite. Nobody saw her, nobody bossed her. They only paid her her wages twice a month. She was independent.

By eight o'clock she was all finished, and her hands were red and angry from the potash and the scrubbing, and sometimes stabbed with splinters. She went to the fish market and bought a piece of lake Goulianos that tasted earthy but was cheap and you could always fight the muddy taste with lots of parsley and lemon in the baking dish.

She went home, and he was up, and she made breakfast. Then she took care of his needs and of the household, laundering, ironing, mending, cleaning, cooking. He tried to help her and he was in the way with his slow one-handed processes, and sometimes she shouted at him and was sorry as soon as she did and took him in her arms like a scolded child.

They went to bed very early. She fell asleep at once. It took him one or two hours to fall asleep because he always was too much rested. One night she woke up, startled – something, somebody was touching her. It was his good hand. At first she began to roll away from him – but she stopped short. Her realization of his intention chased her sleep away completely. She rolled back to him and gave him her body:

'Here, here, let me help thee.'

She was willing, very much, for him, for the nice gentle man. She responded to and actually guided his invalid motions. She felt he was not quite ready so she tried to bolster him with all sorts of little things she had never before done or thought of.

'Here, here, dear.'

She caressed him, encouraged him, kissed him almost passionately. She wanted so much to please him that there was a moment she thought she felt the beginning of pleasure in herself. She was surprised, and she thanked God because she thought it was her reward for being a good wife. She was now jubilant. And now she kissed him with true passion and she was all alerted and ready not to miss the chance. But there were only a few moments of rising harmony. As soon as they were united, she felt him becoming limp again. Slowly but steadily. She became frantic and tried to stop the decline with anything her instinct could invent. She lost. And she knew it was the last time for him, and for her the first and the last.

In the morning, after she returned from the prefecture, she went to the mirror to tidy her hair. She thought her temples were suddenly all covered with gray. And there was more gray on top, too. It might be that she had not had a good look at her hair ever since he had been stricken. It might be that she had grayed overnight. What is the difference? she thought. She did not care. She only prayed to be able to tend her husband as long as he lived.

The Faces of Blood Kindred

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by William Goyen

I. RHODY'S PATH

Sometimes several sudden events will happen together so as to make you believe they have a single meaning if it would only come clear. Surely happenings are lowered down upon us after a pattern of the Lord above.

Twas in the summer of one year; the time the Second Coming was prophesied over the land and the Revivalist came to Bailey's Pasture to prove it; and the year of two memorable events. First was the plague of grasshoppers (twas the driest year in many an old memory, in East Texas); second was the Revival in the pasture across from the house.

Just even to mention the pestilence of hoppers makes you want to scratch all over. They came from over towards Grapeland like a promise of Revelations, all counted to the last as even the hairs of our head are numbered, so says the Bible and so said the Revivalist, making the driest noise in the world – if you have ever heard them. There were so many that they were all clusted together, just one working mass of living insects, wild with appetite and cutting down so fast you could not believe your eyes a whole field of crops. They hid the sun like a curtain and twas half-daylight all that day, the trees was alive with them and shredded of their leaves. We humans were locked in our houses, but the earth was the grasshopper's, he took over the world. It did truly seem a punishment, like the end of the world was upon us, as was prophesied.

Who should choose to come home to us that end of summer but Rhody, to visit, after a long time gone. She had been in New Orleans as well as in Dallas and up in Shreveport too, first married to her third husband in New Orleans, then in Dallas to run away from him in spite, and lastly in Shreveport to write him to go to the Devil and never lay eye on her again. We all think he was real ready to follow the law of that note. Then she come on home to tell us all this, and to rest.

Rhody arrived in a fuss and a fit, the way she is eternally, a born fidget, on the heels of the plague of hoppers. They had not been gone a day when she swept in like the scourge of pestilence. She came into our wasteland, scarce a leaf on a tree and crops just stalks, dust in the air. So had the Revivalist – as if they had arranged it together in Louisiana and the preacher had gone so far as to prophesy the Second Coming in Texas for Rhody's sake. She could make a man do such.

Already in the pasture across the railroad tracks and in front of the house, the Revivalist was raising his tent. We were all sitting on the front porch to watch, when we saw what we couldn't believe our eyes were telling us at first, but knew soon after by her same old walk, Rhody crossing the pasture with her grip in her hand. We watched her stop and set on her suitcase to pass conversation with the Revivalist – she never met a stranger in her life – and his helpers, and we waited for her to come on home across the tracks and through the gate. Mama and Papa and Idalou and some of the children stood at the gate and waited for her; but the birddog Sam sat on the porch and waited there, barking. He was too old – Idalou said he was eighteen – to waste breath running to the gate to meet Rhody.

The hooded flagpole sitter was a part of it all. He had come in advance as an agent for the Revival and sat on the Mercantile Building as an advertisement for the Revival. He had been up there for three days, when the grasshoppers come. Twas harder for him than for anyone, we all imagined. The old-timers said he had brought in the plague of hoppers as part of prophesy. They raised up to him a little tent and he sat under that; but it must have been terrible for him. Most thought he would volunteer to come on down, in the face of such adversity, but no sir, he stayed, and was admired for it. He couldn't sail down his leaflets that advertised the Revival, for the grasshoppers would have eaten those as fast as if they had been green leaves from a tree. But the town had already had leaflets enough that read, 'The Day of Judgment is at Hand, Repent of Your Sins for the Lord Cometh . . . '

The first night he was up twas a hot starry night. We all sat on the porch till late at night rocking and fanning and watching him. There he was over the town, a black statue that hardly seemed real.

When the Revivalist first appeared at the house to ask us for cool water, we invited him in on the back porch. He was a young man to be so stern a preacher, lean and nervous and full of his sermon. His bushy eyebrows met together – for jealousy, Idalou told us after he was gone, and uttered a warning against eyebrows that run together. He started right out to speak of our salvation as if it might earn him a drink of water, and of his own past sinful life in cities before he was redeemed. He wanted our redemption, the way he went on sermonizing, more than cool drink of water; but water was easiest to provide him with and best at hand, as Aunt Idalou said after he had gone. He was a man ready to speak

of his own frailties and Mama praised him for this. He wanted to make us all free and purged of man's wickedness, he said, and his black eyes burned under his joined eyebrows when he spoke of this. When he had left, one of the children – Son – helped him carry the pail of wellwater to the pasture, and then we all broke into sides about who would go to the Revival the next night and who would watch it from the front porch.

When Son came back he was trembling and told that the Revivalist had two Diamond Rattlesnakes in a cage, right in Bailey's Pasture, and that he had shown him the snakes. Then he told us that the Preacher was going to show how the Lord would cure him of snakebite as a demonstration of faith. He had converted and saved thousands through his example of the healing power of the Lord, saying his famous prayer as he was struck by this rattling spear, 'Hand of God, reach down and help antidote the poison of the diamond rattler of Sin'.

Rhody added that she had already found out all this when she came through the pasture and stopped to converse with Bro. Peters – she already knew his name where we hadn't. Then she added that the Revivalist and his company – a lady pianist and three men who were his Stewards and helpers, were going to camp in Bailey's Pasture during their three-day stay in town and that at the last meeting, the flagpole sitter himself was going to come down and give a testimonial. She further informed us that she had taken upon herself the courtesy to invite Bro. Peters and his lady pianist to eat supper with us that night. We were all both excited and scared. But Mama and Idalou began at once to plan the supper and went in to make the fire in the stove to cook it with.

Rhody was not much changed – a person like Rhody could never change, just add on – as she was burdened by something we could not name. We all noticed a limp in her right leg, and then she confessed she had arthritis in it, from the dampness of New Orleans, she said. Her face was the same beautiful one; she had always been the prettiest in the family, taking after Granny who had been, it was a legend that had photographic proof right on the wall, a very beautiful young woman. But Rhody's face was as if seen through a glass darkly, as the Bible says. More had happened to Rhody during the years away than she would ever tell us. 'Some of the Fandango is danced out in her', Aunt Idalou said, and now we would all see the change in Rhody that we all hoped and prayed for.

Rhody was thrilled by the sight of the flagpole sitter. She said she was just dying to meet him. She told us that this town had more excitement in it than any city she had been in – and that included several – and she was glad she had come on home. She unpacked her grip and took out some expensive things of pure silk her husbands had bought for her, and there were presents for us all. Then she put her grip in the pantry as though she was going to stay for a long time but no one asked her for how long. In the early days, Rhody had come and left so often that her feet had trod out her own little path through Bailey's Pasture and we had named it Rhody's Path. It ran alongside the main path that cut straight through to town. We never used it, left it for her; but if she was gone a long time, Mama would say to one of us who was going to town, 'Use Rhody's path, the bitterweeds are taking it over, maybe that'll bring her home', the way mothers keep up their hopes for their children's return, though the weeds grow over and their beds are unused. Mama kept Rhody's room the way Rhody had it before she left for the first time, and the same counterpane was always on the bed, fresh and clean, the big painted chalk figure of a Collie was on the dresser, the fringed pillow a beau had given her with 'Sweetheart' on it, and the framed picture of Mary Pickford autographed by her, 'America's Sweetheart'. 'She's got Sweetheart on the brain', Mama used to say. She carried sweetheart too far.

Anyway, the Revivalist took Rhody's path to come to supper on. Around suppertime here came Bro. Peters and the lady pianist across Bailey's Pasture on Rhody's path, he tall and fast-walking, the little pianist trotting behind him like a little Spitz to keep up with him. They came through the gate and onto the front porch where we all greeted them, and Rhody was putting on a few airs of city ways that made Idalou look at her as if she could stomp her toe. We were introduced to the pianist whose name was Elsie Wade, a little spinster type with freckled hands and birdlike movements of head. Miss Wade asked the Lord to bless this house and said that good Christians always gathered easily as if they were bloodkin, which they were, Bro. Peters added; and we all went in the house, through the hall and onto the back porch. It was a late summer evening and the vines strung across the screen of the porch were nothing but strings after the grasshoppers had devoured them, but through the latticework of string we could see the distant figure of the flagpole sitter that the setting sun set aglow.

Rhody kept wanting to talk about him. She said she thought he looked keen up there. Bro. Peters told that the flagpole sitter had been a drinking man, wild and in trouble in every county of Texas and Louisiana, until he was saved by a chance Revival Meeting in Diboll, where he was sitting on the County Seat flagpole as a stunt for something or other. The night he came down to give himself to the Lord at the meeting brought wagonloads of people from far and wide, across creeks and gulleys to hear and see him, and many were saved. From that time on he gave his services to the Lord by way of the difficult and lonely task of sitting on a flagpole for three days and nights as a herald of the coming Revival. The flagpole sitter and the Diamond Rattlers were the most powerful agents of the gospel and redemption from sin and literally brought thousands of converts into the fold, Bro. Peters told. Rhody said she was dying to meet him and Bro. Peters assured her he would make the introduction personally on the last night of the Revival.

We sat down to a big supper for summertime: cold baking powder biscuits, cold kidney beans, onions and beets in vinegar, sweet milk and buttermilk, fried chicken – there was nothing green in the garden left after the grasshoppers had taken their fill. Idalou told Bro. Peters and Miss Elsie Wade that she had fed the Devil with some good squash that she had rescued from the grasshoppers but burnt to a mash on the stove; and Bro. Peters said that the Devil liked good summer squash and if he couldn't acquire it through his agents of pestilence he would come by it on a too-hot stove – but that he was glad the Devil left the chicken; and all laughed, Rhody loudest of all.

Afterwards we went to the porch and while Idalou played the piano Son sang some solos, 'Drink to me Only', etc. But Rhody spoiled the singing by talking incessantly to the Revivalist. Then Elsie Wade applied her rolling Revival technique to the old piano that no one could talk over, not even Rhody, and made it sound like a different instrument, playing some rousing hymns which we all sang faintly because of our astonishment at the way such a slight little thing as she manhandled the piano as if it was a bull plow.

In the middle of one of the songs there was somebody at the front door, and when Idalou went she found it to be a man from Bro. Peters's outfit over in the pasture. He was anxious to speak to Bro. Peters. Idalou asked him in, but Bro. Peters, hearing the

man's voice, was already in the hallway by the time the man entered. 'Brother Peters!' he called, 'One of the Diamond Rattlers is aloose from the cage.' Bro. Peters ran out and Elsie Wade seemed very nervous, inventing a few furbelows on the treble keys as she looked back over her shoulder with a stiff pencil-like neck at the conversation at the front door. Her eyes were so small and glittering at that moment that she seemed like a fierce little bird that might peck a loose snake to death. Idalou invited her to wait in the house, though. 'The Diamond Rattler is our most valuable property,' Elsie Wade said, 'next to the flagpole sitter.'

All night long they were searching for the Diamond Rattler with their flashlights. We locked all the doors and stayed indoors and watched the lights from the windows. We started a bonfire in the front yard. There were fires in many places in the pasture. The birddog Sam was astonished that we brought him in the house, but he would not stop barking; and Idalou said he would die of a heart attack before daylight if they didn't catch the valuable property of the viper, he was so old. It was a sinister night. At a certain hour we heard that the flagpole sitter had come down to help find the scourge of Sin. And then suddenly like a shot out of the blue Rhody jumped up and said she couldn't stand it any longer, that she was going out to help the poor Revivalist in his search for the Diamond Rattler. Everybody objected and Aunt Idalou said over her dead body, that Rhody's arthritis would hinder her if she had to run; but Rhody, being Rhody, went anyway. So there was that anxiousness added.

We all watched from the parlor window. In the light of the bonfire's flame we could see the eerie posse, darting here, kicking there, and we saw that the Revivalist carried a shotgun. The flagpole sitter had arrived in such a hurry and was so excited that he had not had time to take off his long black robe and hood that he wore on the flagpole, and his priest-like shape in the light of the fires was the most nightmarish of all. On went the search through the dark hours after midnight, and it seemed the Revivalist was looking for his Sin, like some penance, a dark hunter in the night searching for evil. And now Rhody was by his side to help him, as if it could be her sin, her evil, too. They seemed to search together.

We never knew, nor will, exactly what happened. When we heard the shot and saw flashlights centered on one spot, we knew

they had found the snake; and when we saw them coming on Rhody's path towards the house, the Revivalist carrying in his arms something like a drowned person, we knew it was Rhody. They came up on the porch, the Revivalist saying sternly, 'Call the doctor, she was bitten on the hip by the Diamond Rattler and has fainted'. He bit her bad leg.

They laid Rhody on the bed and Bro. Peters began saying his famous prayer asking the Lord to reach down and pluck the poison from his child. 'The snake is killed – the flagpole sitter shot him,' one of the men said.

It was Aunt Idalou who scarified the snakebite with a paring knife and saved the life of Rhody until the doctor got there. Though she did it without open prayer, she prayed to herself as she worked on Rhody and used solid practical ways of salvation – including leaves of Spanish Dagger plant in the front yard which Son ran and got, and hog lard. When the doctor got there he marvelled at the cure and said there was little more to do except for Rhody to rest and lie prone for a few days. Idalou said she could count Rhody's prone days on one hand and Rhody commented that at least the snake had the common sense to strike her bad leg.

When the commotion was over and danger was passed, someone asked where the Revivalist was. He was nowhere to be found. In the early morning light, just breaking, we saw the pasture empty. There was no sign of anybody or anything except the guttering black remains of the bonfires. The flagpole on the Mercantile Building had nothing sitting on it. The whole Revival Company had vanished like a dream . . . and had it all been one, the kind Rhody could bring down upon a place?

We hoped that would teach Rhody a lesson, but Aunt Idalou doubted it seriously. Anyway, Rhody stayed on with us till the very end of summer. Then one day there was that familiar scrambling in the pantry and it was Rhody getting her grip out. There was a mouse's nest in it. She packed it, saying she was going to Austin, to get her a job or take a Beauty Course she had seen advertised. When she had finished it, she told us, she might come back to Charity and open her a Beauty Parlor. We all doubted that, knowing she couldn't stay put for long in any one place, beauty or none.

We all kissed her goodbye and Aunt Idalou cried and asked the plain air what had branded her youngest child with some sign

of restless wandering and when would she settle down to make a household as woman should; and we watched Rhody go on off, on the path across the pasture with her grip in her hand, going off to what, we all wondered.

'Well,' Mama said, 'she'll pull a Fandango wherever she goes. But through some miracle or just plain common sense of somebody always around to protect her, with hog lard, or just good plain prayer, she'll survive and outlast us all who'll worry ourselves into our graves that Rhody will come to put flowers on, alive as ever.' Rhody went out and took the world's risks and chances, but simple remedies of home and home folks rescued and cured her, time and time again. She always had to touch home, set her wild foot on the path across the pasture that led back to the doorstep of the house, bringing to it across the pasture from the great confused and mysterious world on the farther side, some sign of what had lately happened to her to lay it on the doorstep of home.

But with the world changing so fast and all old-time word and way passing so quickly away, she will have to correct *herself* in the world she errs in and by its means; or, in some way, by her own, on her own path, in the midst of her travelling. Surely we knew she needed all of us and had to touch us there, living on endurable and permanent, she thought, in that indestructible house where everything was always the way it had forever been and would never change, she imagined; where all, for her, was redeemed and put aright. Then, when she got something straight – what it was no one but Rhody ever knew – she'd gather her things and go off again.

'The sad thing is,' Idalou said, rocking on the front porch looking at the empty pasture and the sad-looking path that Rhody took, 'that years pass and all grow old and pass away, and this house will be slowly emptied of its tenants.' Had Rhody ever considered this? – and what would she do when all had gone and none to come home to?

But surely all of us who were listening to Idalou were thinking together that the path would remain, grown over and hidden by time, but drawn on the earth, the pasture was engraved with it and like an indelible line; and Rhody's feet would be on it, time immemorial, coming and going, coming and going, child of the path in the pasture between home and homelessness, redemption and error. That was the way she had to go.

II. SAVATA, MY FAIR SISTER

All the rest of us in our family are dark; but Savata my sister is fair. Now Jesus, did you know, was himself a dark man. They say his hair was like lamb's wool and his feet like polished brass. Thank you Jesus.

Being fair complected, my sister Savata has always felt outcast from the rest of us dark ones in the family. I saw this psychology of her early when it put her on the wrong track by driving her away to sing and dance in St. Louis. I wrote to her and said, Savata you are feeling apart; do not; you are blessed and set aside by Jesus. See it thataway; you are marked for special work for our Lord and Savior. Come on up here to Philadelphia where I am and work with Daddy Grace, he will put your fairness to uses of the Lord and His Name. Savata had a singing voice which Jesus blessed her with, thank you Jesus, I had not much of one but gave what I had of it to the Church.

Savata to my surprise came in her fairness to Philadelphia and lent her talent to Daddy Grace. He said he was just borrowing it for the Lord who would return it to her twofold. Well, Savata studied diction and delivery, she studied Hebrew (for we are Black Jews by ancestry), she changed her personality, got all of that baseness out of her system; and in time she got her preaching papers. There is a lot of money, oh a lot of money in God's Church. Savata, my fair sister, and I came to Brooklyn and established the Light of the World Holiness Church. She was ordained a Bishop and I was appointed by her to be her business manager. The Bishop Savata worked hard, Savata sang and Savata preached and I went door to door asking donations for our church. Savata grew more beautiful and more fair. She drew larger and larger crowds, more and more donations. People came from all over to hear and see such a fair Bishop. Many gave as much as $15 per Sunday. Then this little person appeared on our scene.

His name was Canaan Johnson and he was, I will have to admit, a smart thing. He knew Hebrew but was studying it even further; he was a teacher, black as the ace of spades, and asked Savata to set him up as a teacher of Hebrew to the members of the L.O.W.H.C. As we are the Black Jews by our ancestry, Savata announced to her congregation that Canaan Johnson would be at the disposal of them for $1.25 an hour as a teacher of Hebrew, which all must learn to get the true tongue of Jesus, to be rightly

saved. You can't be truly saved in just translation, Canaan Johnson announced to the congregation. Naturally they were all scrambling to him with their $1.25 an hour. Before I knew it Savata had not only taken him as a boarder into her house which the church bought for her as a Bishop's lodgings, but had appointed *him* business manager of the Light of the World Holiness Church. The next thing we knew he had done disbursed $600 for a piano, $3,000 for a pipe organ, and $100 for something we could never find out. I kept quiet (thank you Jesus) and withdrew from Savata's church. I put away my preaching papers and housecleaned for a living. Savata never made one attempt to get in touch with me. I sure had to pray hard to keep religion, I honestly tell you.

All while I was cleaning house, all while I was vacuuming and a-polishing, I studied this situation and I was delivering one long livid sermon to Canaan Johnson, no doubt my masterpiece if it could have been heard. I would not go near to the church except to clean it on Saturdays. I owed this to the Lord and it was not for Savata and Canaan Johnson; it was my tithe. This is how I heard things. Savata had changed radically. She owned more and more possessions. She preached in a streamlined dress of silk and on it she wore a diamond star, I heard. It was her fairness's fault, I said. As we are the Black Jews, her difference became her curse, where she could have made it her blessing. Look how some other handicapped folks do – that Mordecai Blake, he scuffles himself, sitting down, all over the sidewalks of Great Neck in the name of the Church, and gets more contributions than a man with good legs a-walking.

Time passed, with me housecleaning and tithing my time to the L.O.W.H.C. on Saturdays and hearing things and studying what to do. I kept my feelings to myself, thank you Jesus. Until one day I was told by the Lord to go visit Savata and to reason out with her, to try to help her. I went to her house in Brooklyn and what did I find but good Persian rugs on the floor, new slip covers on the furniture and I don't know what all else. Savata, I said, I hear you have a cluster of diamonds shape of the Star of David and a Persian Lamb coat, added to all the rest of this display. Where Savata had before a deep voice for preaching and for singing, she now had a little pussy voice that made me sick at my stomach. She was put-on from head to toe, and it was the working of Mr. Canaan Johnson, believe you me. Savata, my fair sister, I said,

your voice has done changed, your hair has changed in color toward the red side, I cannot believe you are my same sister. Let your sister look you over. Savata would not look me in the eye. You will not look your sister in the eye, I said, but you will scan *her* over to a T to see how stout she is because of her diabetes and to see the varicose veins in her legs from carrying too much weight. I am still in the service of the Lord, despite my personal appearance, I told her that. Savata said I ate too much cream things. To this I said right out, Savata let your sister see your diamonds and your Persian Lamb.

Savata was stand-offish about it and said she did not display her private possessions openly. She said she wore them only around the house. This is around the house, I said, so let me see you in them. I hear tell you blind your congregation with the diamond cluster on Sundays – let it shed a little of its light on your poor sister. She purred and said Canaan Johnson would not like her to display her things openly. How closed can you get, I queried her – in a room with your own flesh and blood kin. Savata prissed and said we had different fathers and I knew it. Now how uncharitable can you get?

Then I had to let go and tell Savata my true feelings, as the Lord had instructed me to if pressed, and for her own good. I said Savata you are a Daughter of Babylon and you know what that is. That man Canaan Johnson is laying up all day studying up while you're out working. He's bound to get the best of you in the end, if he hasn't already. You're *paying* him to, I said. He is the Devil Incarnit. Will you please listen to your sister that you used to look for creesy-greens with in the marshes to make poke salad, that you walked barefooted with in the meadows, singing to Jesus. Remember your mother who raised you up under the apple trees. If you do not remember the days of your youth then may your tongue cleave to the roof of your mouth. We will discard the fact that you ran off to Montgomery and danced in the Sepia Revue of 1952 and remember only that I rescued you up to Philadelphia and saved your soul and put you on the right track. Do not backslide. Oh I told her. You are the fair one, I said, and you are marked off to do a special service by Jesus, and you are just having the wool pulled over your eyes by this studying man. He is smart, I grant you that, and knows Hebrew and studies up all day in his room; but he is studying up, at your expense, to leave you in the end; and pocket all your earnings in his pocket. Savata only whined

back *uh-hu-uh* in that ungodly Lana Turner voice. But I went on.

I said you must withdraw him as business manager of the church and reinstate me before all is lost to the Devil. I have had to go back to housecleaning because I have withdrawn myself from the church. My papers are laying dormant in my bureau drawer, but they are up to date. You know I am overweight and have sugar-poisoning to boot. Savata my sister that the Lord blessed, I said, will you listen to me? But Savata stood calm and cold before me with her arms in a prissy position as if she was embracing herself . . . what that man Canaan Johnson had put into her, among other things, though he was very bright, granted. I got up to leave and said, Savata, you are the fairest of us all and yet have the most talents: with the most talents come the most temptations, I know that. And I know that Daddy Grace promised your talent would be turned back onto you twofold if you gave it to the Lord, and that instead your temptation has been doubled on you – never mind. Listen to me, you have just that much more to preach about – more temptations. Do you think Jesus's disciples were spared temptations? Before I go, though, I would like to ask you one simple temptation and that is to have the courage to put on your Lamb's Wool coat for your diabetic sister and ex-business manager of the Light of the World Holiness Church to see you in it; and pin on your cluster of diamonds.

To my surprise she left the room and came back in her things. She stood before me in her coat that looked like they say the hair of Jesus was. I was impressed: she was a sight; almost, I thought, too physical to be a Bishop. Maybe I had put Savata on the wrong track. I made her take off her shoes and stockings and stand barefooted before me the way nature and God had made her, before Canaan Johnson shod her with brazen slippers. She did not have the legs for a Bishop, that was plain to see. I began to sing softly 'Just as I am Without One Plea'. And to my joy – and thank you Jesus – I heard in a short time the sweet voice of Savata, pure and fair, singing the alto with me, standing barefooted with feet of polished brass and in her hair of Jesus Persian Lamb and with her diamond cluster a-twinkling. She looked like a Saint, her fair face aglow, the Jesus hair of the coat ashining and her cluster aburst with light, in that blessed moment; and I knew that she was still possible, despite her physical make-up, and that more than ever, even more than back in 1952 when she got off on the wrong track, it was my Divine God's business to save her back and steer her

right again. The thing of it was, you had to lead Savata, show her where to go; she would run with the fox or chase with the hounds, either way, you just had to watch her all the time: a bad nature for a Bishop. Still, she had drawing power.

In suddenly walked Canaan Johnson with some deep book in his hand, and you tell by the back of his head how he had been reading it, flat on his back. He had on a velvet smoking jacket. Savata stopped her singing and pursed her lips and said *Ca-na-a-an*; but I went on . . . 'Oh Lamb of Jesus I come, I come . . . '

Canaan Johnson sat down with his finger in his book and Savata sat down. When I finished singing, Canaan Johnson said God bless you Ruby Drew for giving your voice to the Lord, and shot a glance at Savata. I said it is given free of charge to all who will hear it like the wind that doth blow, Canaan Johnson, I charge no fee for it; and looked him straight in his eye. If I should ask a price for what I give, I could have new slip covers too and a house with five rooms and a coat and a diamond cluster. The word of God, translated or no, does not reward us *all* with a velvet smoking jacket. I would be satisfied if it blessed me with just a pair of Denver heels on these old shoes. And if it would allow me a down payment of $5.00 on a refrigerator to save me from carrying ice up four flights to keep my husband's milk from souring. I am a minister of the gospel and have the papers to prove it.

Now, Ruby, he said in that voice, the source of your rancour is about the business manager of the Light of the World Holiness Church. That is obvious. The change has been hard on you but it has brought a great improvement in the Bishop Savata's church. Already the membership has been increased twofold and we are only beginning. It is a man's job to business manage a church.

I see what you mean, I said, snapping him and casting an eye over Savata who had put back on her boa boudoir slippers. You have disbursed $6,000 of the church's funds for a pipe organ without one pipe organist to play it. The piano was ample enough, yet you had to replace it by a new one which you disbursed out $600 for from the funds of the church. You have robed my sister Savata in Lambs Wool and displayed a diamond star cluster upon her breast and covered her furniture with new chintz and put down new rugs upon her floors, all in a new house that was disbursed for out of the church's funds, man's job or none.

For income tax purposes, Canaan Johnson put in; but I cut right through that by asking him as I am my sister's guardian I

have come here to ask what are your plans, Canaan Johnson, and how far are you going with this thing?

My plans are to serve the Lord through the instrument of Savata, he responded.

She is not your instrument, I said. You are playing with a Bishop of Jesus, camouflaging her to look like the Whore of Babylon, and all on the church's funds. In the hands of some men the natural God-made beauty of things is turned into a false idol. I said haven't you found yourself a good thing! Oh I know, I said. Behind all the downfalls of good great women stands an attractive man with presents and lies and private notions. Not a humpback, not a big-eared plain man or a serious settled type, but a jazzy, good-looking oily one with voice of a dove and tongue of a serpent . . .

You are so plainly after the Bishopric, Ruby Drew, Canaan Johnson said, squinching his lashy eyes and fixing them right on me, that you are willing to libel someone. And to that I said Bishopric or not, I have been instructed by the Lord to give up my housecleaning and return to the Church – to the Light of the World Holiness Church to be exact. The Lord and I are going to air out that church. You libel that.

Canaan Johnson became suddenly very crooked looking and said with his oily mouth, well Mrs. Airwick we'll see how far you'll go. Savata sat sparkling in her coat and said nothing. I rose and with the air of a Bishop removed myself from that house.

Before Savata my fair sister and Canaan Johnson knew it, they had themselves a lawsuit on their hands. I sued for the Bishopric and for everything that went with it, the house in Brooklyn complete with rugs and slipcovers, the Lambs Wool coat and the diamond cluster. As they were purchased with the Light of the World Holiness Church's funds, they belonged to it was my plea. The congregation, one big choir that called 'Bishop Savata!' like a bunch of birds on a fence, was seated in the courthouse at the proceedings, and they did not take more than one half hour to outdo me. Although I sat on the stand barefooted and all my God's darkness vested in a Bishop's robe and preached an exposé against possessions in the Lord's name that rocked that courthouse – I said that the Lord don't have no checking account, owns no precious stones, displays nothing but a heart of gold and the natural hair of his head which was like the wool of the lamb, just as nature made it – it fell upon deaf ears. I said that the Prince of

Darkness had come to roost on the steeple of the L.O.W.H.C. But do you think one bit that they cared? They hurrayed Canaan Johnson. They didn't any longer know a good sermon from a bad, Savata and her business manager had corroded them to see only the beauty that perisheth, not the God's lasting truth. They hurrayed Savata and hurrayed Canaan Johnson like some King and Queen. Naturally they won, the court handed down a verdict in their favor. I even had to pay the lawsuit expenses. Well, I went on a-housecleaning, as you know.

Time passed, and you can guess what came to pass . . . just what anybody in their right mind would expect. It only takes time. Mr. Canaan Johnson took his leave one day, without one note or how-do-you-do. Savata sent for me and I found her in tears and a nervous pout. My first question was what did he get, where is the coat and where is the cluster of diamonds? Savata thanked God that she had locked the Lambs Wool coat in her cedarlined closet to keep the moths out of it. But Canaan Johnson got away with the diamonds, naturally. Never mind, I smoothed her, let the devil take the devil's own; you got the coat out of it. But when we went to her cedarlined closet and unlocked it what did we find but a regular moth picnic, they had made a feast of the coat. What they left wasn't enough lamb's wool to cover a baldheaded man. I could have said hoard thou not up treasures on earth but I kept my tongue, thank you Jesus.

Savata had her nervous breakdown and gave two full weeks to it. After it was over, she was meek as a lamb. We deeded the house in Brooklyn over to the old folks of the Light of the World Holiness Church and it was called the House of the Saints. But the church membership fell off to a handful of the faithful. Most wouldn't stay after Canaan and Savata were gone. They went on off and formed them a glamor church of their own. I got out my preaching papers and took over, preparing to build that church up again, this time on solid ground.

Oh I could have made Savata my fair sister eat crow and plenty of it, but I kept God's mercy and suggested with charity, as becomes a Bishop, that Savata take over my housecleaning jobs for awhile until she could get herself straight. That could be her penance.

And that's why I've come by here to speak to you, to tell you that Savata my fair sister will be replacing me every Thursday from now on. I figure while she's on her knees in her repentance

she might as well bend over and move around a little with a mopping rag in her hand; and while she's walking the floor a studying her sins, it will do her no harm to push along a vacuum cleaner ahead of herself. Her repentance, joined to practical uses, will therefore earn back a little of what her wickedness lost. In that way, sin can pay a little – and it will show Savata how little: $1.10 an hour, to be exact.

So thank you for listening to my story that has introduced you to Savata, my fair sister and your new cleaning woman. And thank you, Jesus.

Sad

by John Coleman

nobody liked his face: his breath was stinking:
he had an incipient hump: his lonely drinking
was a scandal in several boroughs: he fell off stools
but nobody picked him up: he scrawled in pools
of wine and beer tiny scatological figures
but all that hung in his ears was his own dry sniggers:
his clothes were unbuttoned: he'd always had toilet trouble:
he was five feet three and a half: a browning bubble
of spit at his limp mouth corner wherever he walked,
he was a man to whom very few people talked:
nobody properly took to him: everyone shy:
nobody took to him: neither, by God, did I.

The Interview

A Play for radio by Muriel Spark

The scene is a large flat off Knightsbridge, the abode of Dame Lettice Chatterton, who was well known in political circles during the twenties; of her companion-secretary, Miss Bone (who is practising for a General Knowledge Quiz); and, intermittently, of her nephew, Roy, a theological student. It is late afternoon in winter.

LETTICE: Why don't you get your teeth seen to, Tiggy? They look terrible.

TIGGY: It's raining again.

LETTICE: I always think that's one of the most important things about a woman, her teeth.

TIGGY: It says rain continuing well into the afternoon, temperature slightly above average.

LETTICE: How far had we got?

TIGGY: 'My personality . . .'

LETTICE: Oh, Tiggy, read the whole sentence.

TIGGY: 'It has therefore always been difficult for me, with so many sides to my personality . . .'

(*Pause*)

LETTICE: Go on, continue.

TIGGY: You didn't finish the sentence.

LETTICE: I'm sure I did.

TIGGY: I'm sure you are.

LETTICE: It has therefore always been difficult for me comma with so many sides to my personality comma to present only one of those sides at any one time to the world full stop. If these memoirs (underline memoirs) prove anything at all comma they prove . . . they prove . . . We have to think this out carefully, Tiggy.

TIGGY: See now, it's stopped. And it said rain continuing well into the afternoon. You can't depend on . . .

LETTICE: I say, *we have to think this over carefully, Tig-gee.* You keep on and on about the weather. Draw the curtains.

TIGGY: I don't like the curtains.

LETTICE: What's wrong with them? They cost me a fortune.

TIGGY: *When* they were new. Oh, you should see some of the other flats in this block, so beautifully decorated. This wallpaper gives me the pip, Dame Lettice. Diamond-patterned – all over the flat, faded diamond-patterned. What colour was it when it was new?

LETTICE: As I say, Tiggy, if you are not satisfied you can go elsewhere.

TIGGY (*reading from newspaper*): 'Temperature slightly above average. Later fog.' –

– It's a pity the curtains look like the fog, Dame Lettice. They look like a drab velvet fog. So do the walls, they are a diamond-patterned fog. You would think we were living in a cellar instead of a third-floor flat in the very best quarter. You have no colour sense, Dame Lettice, that's your trouble.

LETTICE: Sombre shades, Tiggy, are conducive to the life of the imagination. Draw the curtains.

(*Curtains drawn*)

TIGGY: It puts me off my stroke, this room. Now, if you would only get your Regency chairs upholstered, say in a nice striped brocade, and if you would only get rid of that smoky old paraffin stove . . . and if you would only tidy up all those old papers . . .

LETTICE: Sh-sh-sh. Listen! Isn't that a key in the front door?

TIGGY: No. Couldn't be.

LETTICE: I thought it might be Roy.

TIGGY: No. Couldn't be Roy.

LETTICE: What do you mean, *couldn't* be Roy? I want the truth, Tiggy.

TIGGY: Afghanistan – principal exports: lambskin, fruit, cotton, wool, carpets, spices . . .

LETTICE: Has he gone to Afghanistan? Tiggy, if you know anything at all, you must tell me what you know.

TIGGY: A plus B squared equals A squared plus two AB plus B squared.

LETTICE: Tiggy, you are amusing, Tiggy. Now Tiggy, if you have the least clue as to my nephew's whereabouts, Tiggy you know how I've been worrying about Roy . . . where do you think he can be?

TIGGY: Well, as I was saying yesterday, wherever he's gone, he's gone by air. I know he left from London Airport, as I told you yesterday.

LETTICE: You said nothing of the sort yesterday. Tiggy, you are making this up.

TIGGY: No, no, Dame Lettice, I told you the day after he disappeared that he had left from London Airport. Don't you remember I said . . .

LETTICE: You said nothing of the kind. I have been making enquiries all over England for the past three weeks. How do you know he left from London Airport?

TIGGY: I heard him at the street door giving directions to the taxi driver. Lebanon – gold, citrus, apples, wool, cotton, vegetables, hides and skins . . .

LETTICE: Roy must be abroad. Why didn't you tell me this before, Tiggy?

TIGGY: Oh I did, Dame Lettice. It's your memory again. Remember how bad your memory is. Remember . . .

LETTICE: Where's that letter? Tiggy, find Roy's letter.

(*Looking amongst papers*)

Is it under the sofa, Tiggy?

TIGGY: No. Couldn't be.

LETTICE: Tiggy, I wish you would do something about these papers lying all over the place. How can I find Roy's letters among all this muddle . . . ? Papers, papers . . .

(*Papers turned over*)

Why won't you file them away, Tiggy?

TIGGY: The filing cabinets are full.

LETTICE: We shall have to order more.

TIGGY: There's no room in the flat for more filing cabinets, is there now? Let's be honest. There are two in Roy's room, three in mine, that makes five. Four in here, three in . . . oh, and such dreary articles, practically the colour of mud. Do you know what they look like to me? – Those battered old jeeps that the Yanks used to go about in during the war. Ah, remember the Yanks, Dame Lettice! Those were the days. There was one called Lance, he was . . .

LETTICE (*turning over papers*): Tiggy, where is Roy's letter?

TIGGY: It's lost.

LETTICE: What do you mean, it's lost?

TIGGY: But I know it by heart, it goes, 'Dear Auntie, I do not know how long I shall be away. Please do not attempt to locate me. Don't follow. I shall explain on my return. Yours, Roy.'

LETTICE: Why should he go abroad at this time of year? Tiggy, if only he didn't have so many sides to his personality, one would know where one stood.

TIGGY: He may be in trouble. He may have gone into hiding,

have you thought of that? Consulo, consulĕre, consului, consultum, verb to consult. Carpo, carpêre, carpsi, carpsum, verb to pluck. Oh, Dame Lettice, do you remember that friend of Roy's by name of Trevor? No, you won't remember with your memory, Dame Lettice. That person he knows, called Trevor, remember, he was mixed up in the shooting case at St. John's Wood, remember, something to do with Sylvia Tree. Don't you remember Sylvia Tree, that dark girl? The case came up, remember, I think there were drugs mentioned.

LETTICE: I do recall a Trevor. Roy brought him here one Sunday. There's nothing wrong with my memory, Tiggy.

TIGGY: Oh, yes there is, Dame Lettice. It's the smoke from the stove. Paraffin fumes are so bad for the memory. You have forgotten that Roy was *very interested* in Trevor, and Sylvia Tree. He wanted to save their souls.

LETTICE: Tiggy, do you think Roy has got himself *mixed up in something*? He is due back at the Theological College in two days' time. He might have gone anywhere, he is so good at languages. Do you think he could be mixed up in . . .

TIGGY: Yes, I'm sure of it. Syria: population three point eight million, area seventy thousand eight hundred square miles, principal exports, cereals, animals, cotton, textiles, wool . . . He says in his letter he will explain on his return. I should forget about him in the meantime if I were you, Dame Lettice.

LETTICE: Tiggy, you are dropping ash on the carpet, do be careful.

TIGGY: Oh, it will blend in. The father of Shem was Noah. Don Quixote is the hero of the book by that name written by the Spaniard Cervantes. I am going to win that twelve hundred on the General Knowledge Quiz, I feel it in my bones. Oh, how wonderful! I say, Dame Lettice, *he will explain on his return.*

LETTICE: There is an ashtray in Roy's room, Tiggy, go and fetch it.

TIGGY: Oh-oh-oh. I don't like going in there. All those water colours, they remind me of poor Roy. Suppose something has happened to him? But never mind, Dame Lettice, he will explain on his return.

LETTICE: What does he mean, he will explain on his return? I only hope his theological studies have not gone to his head.

TIGGY: I think they must have. I expect he has gone chasing Sylvia Tree.

LETTICE: Who is Sylvia?

TIGGY: Friend of Trevor. Roy said she was a witch.

LETTICE: Did he? What did he mean, a witch? Why should a theological student run after a witch?

TIGGY: To catch her, I suppose. And he will explain on his return. Hengist and Horsa were the reputed leaders of the first Anglo-Saxon invasion . . .

(*Fade*)

LETTICE: What can he mean, he will explain on his return? I shall keep him waiting, of course. And then I shall say to him, 'Oh, hallo Roy, enjoy your trip?' And he will say to me, 'Enjoy it! If only you knew . . .'

ROY: If only you knew the difficulties I have been facing. Do you remember Sylvia Tree?

LETTICE: Of course. A dark girl, a friend of Trevor what's-his-name.

TIGGY (*from distance*): Don't start imagining things, Dame Lettice. You know it doesn't do any good.

LETTICE: A dark girl, a friend of Trevor what's-his-name.

ROY: A very dark girl. She's a witch. Do you know what I've discovered? I discovered a complete witchcraft organization in St. John's Wood. You think witchcraft does not exist, don't you? Well, you're wrong.

LETTICE: Roy, what are you talking about? Your theological studies . . .

ROY: I had suspicions three months ago. I began to take notes. I will read them to you. One, Sylvia Tree is the leader and Trevor Loam is her accomplice. Two, they hold a Sabbath once a month where they drink human blood. Three, they bewitch men and motor cars. Four, they make wax images of their enemies and stick pins into them. Five, they have made a covenant with the Devil. Six, they . . .

LETTICE: How much did you spend on this trip abroad?

ROY: Use your imagination, Auntie. (*Starts coughing*) Oh, that dreadful paraffin stove!

LETTICE: How much?

ROY: Would you grudge a few pounds for the cause of God and justice? Sylvia Tree found out that I was watching her. She went abroad. I followed her, of course. I found her in Stuttgart drinking coffee.

LETTICE: Sit down, Roy, and let us get this straight. No, don't sit on that Regency chair. I won't have people sitting on my good chairs. Sit on the sofa and mind the papers. I don't see why you should have followed this Sylvia Tree. You ought to have informed the police and left it to them.

ROY: The police are far too superstitious. They won't touch witchcraft. And do you realize it is my duty to the cloth to rout the Devil personally. There are many known methods of discovering a witch. They are quite reliable methods. You can subject them to physical examination and to interrogation. A witch may have supernumerary teats, she may fail to respond to prickings. Sylvia, for instance, has an area of her body which is insensate to the prick of a pin. I have proved it. I have proved . . .

LETTICE: You haven't been sticking pins into a girl?

ROY: Indeed yes. What else could I do? I captured Sylvia and applied all the known tests . . . Is that someone at the door?

LETTICE: No, I don't hear anyone at the door. Tell me . . .

ROY: Oh, I thought it might be the police. Unfortunately, you see, Trevor found me putting Sylvia to the test, and of course, being her accomplice, he is very cross. I escaped. But he has been to the police. You must hide me somewhere, Auntie, until the fuss dies down. Then I shall emerge, and theology will take its course, and we shall triumph over . . .

(*Fade*)

LETTICE: Tiggy, where are you? Tiggy – where's that girl? Tiggy! Tiggy!

(*Fade*)

(*Scene pause*)

TIGGY: Hallo, Dame Lettice, how are we?

LETTICE: Tiggy, where have you been?

TIGGY: Oh, I went out for half an hour to give myself a change.

LETTICE: I do wish you had told me beforehand, Tiggy. And it's so foggy outside. I think there must be something wrong with you, Tiggy, to go out in . . .

TIGGY: It's foggy inside.

LETTICE: Oh, Tiggy, it's unbearable. I . . .

TIGGY: I'm glad you see that, Dame Lettice, I'm glad you are beginning to see my point of view . . .

LETTICE: I mean, about Roy. To think of Roy, Tiggy! I think he has gone off his head.

TIGGY: Not him.

LETTICE: Now suppose, Tiggy, he has gone to hunt this witch. And suppose . . .

TIGGY: What witch?

LETTICE: Sylvia Tree. You told me yourself, Tiggy, he thinks she is a witch.

TIGGY: Not me. I never mentioned witch. You have such an imagination, Dame Lettice. And *no* memory. Known throughout the world as 'The Whispering Giant', the Bristol Britannia is the largest turbo-prop airliner in service today. The Britannia 310, powered by four Bristol Proteus . . .

LETTICE: Shut up, Tiggy. Just you shut up. We are wasting our time. Where had we got to? Read the whole sentence.

TIGGY: You didn't finish the sentence.

(*Curtain drawn back*)

See, look, it's foggy outside. Almost as bad as inside.

LETTICE: Read the previous sentence, Tiggy. Hurry up.

(*Pause while Tiggy finds the place*)

TIGGY: 'It has therefore always been difficult for me, with so many sides to my personality, to present only one of those sides to the world. If these memoirs prove anything at all they prove . . .'

LETTICE: They prove . . . they prove . . . the supremacy of the world of . . . of . . .

TIGGY: Imagination. I do think it a pity to spoil the interior of a luxury flat like this with all the murky stuff you've put into it . . .

LETTICE (*shouting her down*): The supremacy of the world of imagination comma a world in which literally anything can happen comma over the mundane facts of . . . of . . .

TIGGY: Everyday life.

LETTICE: Everyday life. Listen! – There's the key in the door.

TIGGY: No. Couldn't be.

LETTICE: I thought it might be Roy.

TIGGY: Couldn't be.

LETTICE: Couldn't it? Oh, couldn't it? You seem to know a lot. You seem to forget Roy is a student of theology, and therefore has some sense of responsibility towards his only relative.

TIGGY: You never know how theology's going to take a young man. Roy has got ideas about religion, he has got his own ideas, I can tell you that much.

LETTICE: Tiggy, I have thought over the question whether he has gone to hunt witches. I do not really believe, Tiggy, that Roy who is so good at languages, would go abroad and waste them on a witch.

TIGGY: Captain Hornblower is the central character in C. S. Forester's series of books. Theology's a dangerous subject for a sensitive young man like Roy with funny ideas.

LETTICE: Roy is perfectly orthodox. The principal of the Theological College wrote to me . . .

TIGGY: Did you notice when he came home he wouldn't eat meat on a Friday? Fish on a Friday keep your nose tidy.

LETTICE: Oh, that is quite common among theological students, Tiggy . . .

TIGGY: Did you see him reading from a Roman breviary? It was all in Latin. I saw it. Lord Palmerston was British Prime Minister from 1855 to 1858.

LETTICE: Tiggy, you must either practise for the Quiz in your spare time or leave. The distractions are . . .

TIGGY: If I win I'll leave. Just imagine Roy flitting round the back streets of the Vatican. You shouldn't have put him in for Holy Orders, Dame Lettice. I told you at the time.

LETTICE: What do you mean, the Vatican?

TIGGY: Gliding through the dark alleys, in and out the archways, murmuring with Jesuits. Up the winding staircase . . . breathing incense. And he's so good at languages, how they would love to catch him!

LETTICE: Oh, I shouldn't stand for it, I should never stand for it. Not another penny would he get from me, Tiggy. Can you imagine such a thing?

TIGGY: Quite clearly. That's what he means when he says, 'I will explain on my return.'

LETTICE: I shall keep calm, Tiggy. I shall say to him, 'Oh, hallo, Roy, enjoyed your trip?' and he'll say, 'Well, *enjoyed* is hardly . . .'

(*Fade*)

ROY: . . . *enjoyed* is hardly the word. However I can accurately say that my journey and mission were satisfactory.

LETTICE: You flew home, I suppose?
ROY: No, hitch-hiked. Fasting. Like a pilgrim.
LETTICE: I thought you probably came on wings.
ROY: Oh, no. I have changed my religion, Auntie, since I came on vacation. Remember the first day, it was raining? Well, it was *such* a wet day that I *simply* decided to go over to Rome.
LETTICE: Roy, have you forgotten what Dr. Keble said to your great-great-grandfather?
ROY: Yes, absolutely.
LETTICE: Not another penny of mine do you get, Roy. I hope you understand that, Roy.
ROY: Yes, absolutely. It doesn't make the slightest difference. I have completely renounced the world, my past errors, you and Tiggy. I have come to say goodbye. (*Starts coughing*) Oh dear, my chest! Your stove! (*Gasping*) I return to Rome tonight. Two years at Rome. Then to the mission field . . . (*Fading out*) Fortunately I am good at languages . . . Perpetual vows . . . The Congo . . . Behind the Iron Curtain . . .
LETTICE: Are you there, Tiggy? Tiggy, where are you? Tiggy! It is most unpleasant never knowing where you are . . . Tiggy!

(*Fading out*)

I have something important . . .

(*Scene pause*)

LETTICE: Tiggy, where have you been?
TIGGY: Oh, I was just having a lay-down.
LETTICE: *Lie*-down.
TIGGY: A lie-down. You been day-dreaming again?
LETTICE: No, Tiggy, just thinking.
TIGGY: Well, it's very bad for you. What have you been thinking about?
LETTICE: Just let me get my breath, Tiggy. My head aches.
TIGGY: Poor Roy. Do you know I'm really sorry for Roy.
LETTICE: Oh, Tiggy, can't we save him? He has gone over to Rome.
TIGGY: Not him.
LETTICE: I know it in my bones.
TIGGY: Your bones are in error. Do you believe in witchcraft, Dame Lettice?
LETTICE: Don't be absurd, Tiggy. This is serious. Poor Roy! The

Vatican . . . the winding alleyways . . . perpetual vows. After all my efforts . . .

TIGGY: Would you say, just speaking impersonally, Dame Lettice, that one can affect the course of nature by the power of thought?

LETTICE: Tiggy, I am not interested in your Quiz at this moment.

TIGGY: I just wanted to know, Dame Lettice, if you did believe in witchcraft. Because I do. Do you know what I think?

LETTICE: I must send a telegram to the Theological College right away. They must get in touch with Roy at Rome. Tiggy, take down this wire. Are you ready? Address to the Principal . . .

TIGGY: Do you know what I think? I think you practise witchcraft on poor Roy. You are always making a wax image of him and sticking pins into it.

LETTICE: Stop your nonsense, Tiggy, and take this wire. The Principal, the Theological College . . . '

TIGGY: *A wax image and sticking pins into it.* There's no point in sending a wire. Poor Roy hasn't changed his religion. That I do know.

LETTICE: How do you know? The truth, Tiggy.

TIGGY: He never had a religion in the first place.

LETTICE: Well, Tiggy, you yourself suggested . . .

TIGGY: It's your imagination again, Dame Lettice. The way you keep working over poor Roy in your mind, it's like sticking pins into his image. Poor Roy, I *am* sorry for him. 'Glorious First of June' commemorates the British naval victory off Ushant, 1794. Charles XII of Sweden, 1682 to 1718, was a courageous but frequently impulsive monarch. Benvenuto Cellini . . .

LETTICE: I pay you a wage. You do admit that, Tiggy, don't you?

TIGGY: I know what you're going to say next. 'I have made *my* house *your* home, Tig-gee.' I know how you talk, you see I know how you talk.

LETTICE: Where had we got to? I want the last sentence, that's all I'm asking. It's a small thing . . .

TIGGY: 'If these memoirs prove anything at all they prove the supremacy of the world of imagination, a world in which literally anything can happen, over the mundane facts of everyday life.'

LETTICE: Full stop new paragraph. It has always been my rule

to submit all personal problems to the test of the imagination full stop. When I first entered politics in 1920 – Tiggy, where's my diary for 1920?

TIGGY: Everyone knows what you said to Lloyd George in 1920. You've quoted it dozens of times.

LETTICE: Tiggy, I repeat. Where's my diary for 1920?

TIGGY: You said to Lloyd George, 'Politics, my dear Lloyd George, are imagination and imagination is politics'.

LETTICE (*turning over papers*): Where's that diary?

TIGGY: And he replied, 'You are very self-observant, Madam'.

LETTICE: Oh no, he didn't. Oh, Tiggy, he did not. There are some things, Tiggy let me tell you, which are a closed book to you. Where's the diary for 1920 . . .

(*Papers turned over*)

1921 . . . '29 . . . 1936 . . . that's not it. Where . . .

TIGGY: Sh-sh-sh. What's that noise?

LETTICE: Where? Could it be . . . ?

TIGGY: No. Couldn't be. The Julian calendar is the calendar instituted by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C. The Venus's Fly-Trap is an insect-devouring plant. He may be dabbling in politics, have you thought of that?

LETTICE: Roy has no brain for politics, Tiggy, even though he is good at languages. You need imagination for politics. If he'd shown any promise for politics, I should never have put him in for theology.

TIGGY: Ah – your memory's going. You don't recall his friend Trevor from St. John's Wood. You don't remember Sylvia Tree.

LETTICE: Certainly I do. They are connected with witchcraft. I hardly think Roy is interested in witchcraft in this weather.

TIGGY: Oh, it's really sad the way you wander off the subject, Dame Lettice. I blame the wallpaper, it's bound to have an effect. I was only saying about their politics, but if you don't want to hear . . .

LETTICE: Is there anything *shady* about them, Tiggy?

TIGGY: Well, they are members of the Party, I know it for a fact. The Sea Cucumber is a member of the starfish family. The Leaning Tower of Soo Chow, China, is over one thousand, three hundred years old . . .

(*Fade*)

(*Sound of key in door and rapid footsteps. Door bangs. Roy breathless*)

ROY: A little job abroad. I can't go into details, Auntie, you must realize that. It was just a little job . . . Well, I'll tell you one thing, but you must treat it as confidential. I've been in Yugoslavia doing a little job there. Has anybody been here asking for me?

LETTICE: Sit down, Roy. Have you enjoyed your trip?

ROY: Has anyone been looking for me? Anybody asking questions?

LETTICE: No, Roy, not a soul.

ROY: Switch out the light while I look out of the window.

(*Goes to window*)

I thought so! There are shadows lurking in the fog. The flat is being watched. Auntie, you must hide me. Where can I go?

LETTICE: This is all very shady, Roy. Kindly draw those curtains and switch on the light.

(*Curtains drawn*)

ROY: If anyone rings the door bell, don't answer it. If the telephone rings, don't answer. (*Coughs*) Please turn off that ghastly stove. I must find a hiding-place. The linen cupboard is too obvious. Your wardrobe . . . oh, they always look in wardrobes. What about the cupboard in Tiggy's bedroom? There are lots of old boxes there, I might look like one of them.

LETTICE: From whom are you hiding?

ROY: M.I.5. They've got Sylvia already. Trevor got away. He took to the mountains.

LETTICE: What were you doing in Yugoslavia, Roy?

ROY: A little job for the Party. A *nice* little job. You may see something in the papers tomorrow.

LETTICE: Not about you, Roy?

ROY: No. About Yugoslavia. I must go and prepare a place in Tiggy's cupboard. They might be coming for me any time.

LETTICE: You realize, Roy, not another penny do you get out of me while you remain a Communist.

ROY: Money? Dear me, don't let that bother you. I've made a packet. All that worries me is . . .

LETTICE: I suppose you did not stop to think of my reputation . . .

ROY: And what were you doing in 1932?

LETTICE: Now Roy, you know I gave up the Fascist movement as soon as . . .

ROY: As soon as you thought it would ruin your reputation. Our

cause is above reputation. We are not finished, we are only beginning. We shall . . .

LETTICE: To think what Bonar Law said to your father in 1922! He said . . .

ROY: Listen! There's someone outside the door. Put out all the lights. I'm going to hide. Where's Tiggy? Tiggy will conceal me. Tiggy!

(*Door bell*)

Tiggy! Tiggy!

LETTICE: Tiggy, where are you? Tiggy!

(*Fade*)

(*Scene pause*)

LETTICE: Tiggy, this is not good enough. I have been calling you, I . . .

TIGGY (*approaching*): What's the matter? I don't get any time to myself in this job. That's the worst of living-in. I have been tidying up the cupboard in my room. What do you want?

LETTICE: Tiggy, I feel ill.

TIGGY: You must have eaten something.

LETTICE: I haven't eaten anything.

TIGGY: You've been drinking something.

LETTICE: Tiggy, you know I don't take drink. My blood pressure . . .

TIGGY: You've been drinking Roy's life blood, you old succubus.

LETTICE: I have been meditating.

TIGGY: Meditating is eating in the spiritual sense. I should take up smoking if I were you, Dame Lettice, it's good for the nerves.

LETTICE: Oh, Tiggy, I read an article about smoking, it's so dangerous.

TIGGY: Hell is more dangerous. You should chew gum, Dame Lettice. That helps to keep the mind under control and provides a soothing action for the jaws.

LETTICE: If Roy has become a Communist, Tiggy, I think I shall go mad.

TIGGY: Well, you won't have to go far. No, don't cry, Dame Lettice. I can't bear to see you cry. Life is too short, Dame Lettice, for tears. Lima is the capital of Peru. The capital of Yemen is Sana. If you don't want me just now I think I'll go and finish cleaning out the cupboard. It ought to be done before Roy comes back.

LETTICE: What has Roy to do with the cupboard in your bedroom? Tiggy, he is coming here to hide, isn't he? – Don't go, Tiggy.

TIGGY: He usually hides in the cupboard in my bedroom. He waits till my day's work is finished and then he tells me all his little troubles.

LETTICE: I hope he doesn't notice your teeth. Tiggy, you have worse teeth than any woman I know. What troubles can Roy have to tell you, I ask you, Tiggy, how can he have any troubles? The Theological College is quiet, secluded and conducive to the untroubled mind. He has a generous allowance from me, and one day will inherit all I possess – that's when I'm gone, Tiggy, when I'm gone. But he had better give a good account of himself on his return or not another penny does he get from me. My mind is made up.

TIGGY: Suppose he gets married?

LETTICE: Roy is a born celibate, Tiggy, how could he get married, I ask you, can you see Roy getting married?

TIGGY: If you stretch your imagination a little, perhaps . . .

LETTICE: *My* imagination! There's nothing wrong with my imagination. You stretch yours, Tiggy, and see if you can imagine Roy getting married to a girl. He doesn't know any girls.

TIGGY: There's Sylvia Tree.

LETTICE: Is she after him? I say, Tiggy, between old friends, what has Roy confided to you about Sylvia Tree?

(*Door bell*)

TIGGY: There's the door bell.

LETTICE: It may be Roy. He may have lost his key.

TIGGY: No. Couldn't be Roy. It's too early.

(*Door bell*)

LETTICE: Quickly, Tiggy, go and see who it is.

TIGGY: It's a telegram –

(*Opens it*)

'Home tonight. Love, Roy.'

LETTICE: Give it to me. Let me see it.

TIGGY: It's mine, it's addressed to me.

LETTICE: That must be a mistake. Let me see the telegram. Where did he send it from?

TIGGY: Brest. As I expected.

LETTICE: In Russia, I knew it!

TIGGY: No, Brest in Brittany. Doesn't that ring a bell, Dame Lettice?

LETTICE: A ring at the bell? It may be Roy.

TIGGY: No, couldn't be. He's in *Brittany* – you know, don't you, that there's a Druid movement in Brittany? Look at the fog, how thick it is. I hope Roy won't be caught in it. Funny to think of Roy as a Druid.

LETTICE: My dear Tiggy, Roy hasn't time to be a Druid.

TIGGY: Brest is also a famous hideout for international smuggling gangs, you know that, don't you? I am just telling you the facts.

LETTICE: You will never convince me Roy has the wits for smuggling.

TIGGY: Only the day before he left he said to me – as he came out of my cupboard – he said, 'Independence of thought, Tiggy, and financial independence as well. Those are what I need.' Independence Day in Ceylon is 4th February. Independence Day in the U.S.A. is 4th July.

(*Fade*)

ROY: But you don't know anything *about* the Druid movement, Auntie. It's a deep subject. Since I was initiated three months ago life has been far more meaningful. (*Coughs slightly*) I have seen the sun rise at Stonehenge. (*Coughs*) I have assisted at the rites on Tower Hill, the Isle of Mull, and at Avebury, and I have just been to Brittany to participate in a rite of the utmost antiquity, it was most stimulating. If you knew anything of the elaborate symbolism of nature worship, Auntie, you would . . . (*Coughs*) Oh, that nasty stove . . . after the pure air of Brittany! . . .

LETTICE: Not another penny do you get from me, Roy. I won't countenance a crank in the family.

ROY (*his voice becomes remote and hollow, and he speaks in a sort of chant*): Inde-pendence of thought. The Theo-logical College was quite un-bearable. It was driving me to dis-traction till I dis-covered Inde-pendence. Spirit-ual Inde-pendence. As Tiggy might say Inde-pendence Day, Colombia, 20th July. Inde-pendence Day, Belgium, 21st July. Syl-via Tree has inde-pendent means.

LETTICE: Oh, Roy, is Sylvia Tree a Druid?

ROY (*normal voice*): Not yet. But she has agreed to symbolize the Fruits of the Earth at our next ceremony. You see the Fruits of

the Earth has to be a non-Druid. But Sylvia will become a Druid one day, like me. She has independent means.

LETTICE: I should never have thought, Roy, that you would stoop to marrying a woman for her money. I would rather see you going in for the Quiz like Tiggy. Besides, are you sure Miss Tree will accept you? If she has independent means, surely . . .

ROY (*character changes to tough*): Me marry Sylvia Tree? I'm out for big money, my dear. Sylvia has only a pittance. Turn off that stove.

LETTICE: You won't make money by being a Druid, Roy. Have some sense, you are just like your father.

TIGGY (*distant*): Tell her why you have been to Brittany, Roy.

LETTICE (*voice raised*): You keep out of this, Tiggy. Roy has been to Brittany to meet the Druids.

ROY: No, Auntie. I've been to meet J.A.17 and F.10 and Q.L.215. These are my contacts. We had a little job to do, you see. Now you've got to hide me somewhere because they're after me, see?

LETTICE: A little job for the Party! I knew it. What are you doing, Roy? – Leave that stove alone. Don't you touch it.

ROY: Oh, I've burnt my hand.

LETTICE: Serves you right. A little job for the Party! (*Coughs*) Oh, I am overcome. Light that stove again immediately. A little job for the . . . !

ROY: Not for the Party, dear. For number one. A few carton cases packed with bank notes and other items have been delivered by sea to Mr. J.A.17, Mr. F.10, and Mr. Q.L.215. It was a rough passage, I don't care for these little fishing boats. But it was worth it – or will be, Auntie dear, if you can hide me somewhere. M.I.5 have got poor old Q.L.215, and I don't know how much he's told them. Where can I hide if necessary? Think of something, you old gin-trap.

LETTICE: Tiggy, where are you?

ROY: Of course . . . Tiggy will help. There's a deep cupboard in her bedroom, I'll get in there and she can pull the wardrobe in front of the door. Now remember . . .

LETTICE: Tiggy! I want you.

TIGGY (*approaching from a distance*): . . . and his most famous saying was 'Live! Our servants can do that for us.' I never get a minute to myself. I am tidying up the cupboard in my potty little bedroom. Roy likes hiding in there. You've been *at* poor Roy again, haven't you? Sticking pins . . .

LETTICE: He inherits nothing, do you understand, Tiggy. Not a penny if he has taken up smuggling.

TIGGY: I thought it was Druids. One minute you talk about Druids and the next minute you talk about smuggling. I suggest you keep to one subject. The Treaty of Locarno, 1925.

(*Curtains drawn back*)

Look at the fog out there, how thick it is. Almost as bad as the smoke from . . .

LETTICE: There's nothing wrong with my stove. Draw those curtains, Tiggy, and stop wasting time. Smuggling was the last idea I had. It just came to me. I feel terrible. What time do you think he will arrive?

TIGGY: Any time tonight.

LETTICE: I wonder if he will come by air or fishing boat?

TIGGY: By air. First class passage paid.

LETTICE: You seem to know a lot.

TIGGY: Poor Roy.

LETTICE: It isn't, Tiggy, as if I had ever refused him his independence. I've always allowed him to do anything he likes. I just want to know *what* he's doing. So I don't see why you should say 'poor Roy' like that.

TIGGY: Poor Roy, suppose he's dead. Suppose his plane has crashed in the fog and he's lying dead at this very moment.

LETTICE: What a ghastly thought. Ring the airport at once, Tiggy.

TIGGY: Killed by the power of your wicked imagination.

LETTICE: Ring the airport, Tiggy, and enquire.

TIGGY: Which airport? How do you know what airport he left from or what plane he took? Anyway, if he's dead, he's dead, and he and I shall never be married. You always did say he was a born celibate.

LETTICE: What are you saying – *married*?

TIGGY: Roy and I are engaged to be married. Limnology is the division of biology dealing with fresh-water organisms.

LETTICE: That I don't believe.

TIGGY: Perfectly true. We are engaged to be married and limnology is . . .

LETTICE: We are wasting precious time, Tiggy. I can't bear waste of time. Sit down, Tiggy. Now, my memoirs. Where did we get to? Read the last paragraph. You are fifteen years older

than Roy. A *good* fifteen years. And your teeth – really, Tiggy. The last paragraph, if you please.

TIGGY: 'It has always been my rule to submit all personal problems to the test of the imagination full stop. When I first entered politics in 1920 . . . '

LETTICE: My diary for 1920. Haven't you found it yet? Look here, Tiggy, there is something we must get clear. If you are thinking of running after Roy at your time of life, I must tell you there is no chance for you. Roy is not the marrying type, and if he were, there would be no chance for you. Just use your imagination. I feel, of course, that I shall have to warn poor Roy of this quite absurd notion you have in your head. He is very sensitive and might easily be led into something foolish.

TIGGY: Sh-sh-sh. There's the key in the front door.

(*Key opening front door. Door closes. Footsteps*)

It *is* Roy. It really is. He's early.

LETTICE: At last! Are you sure, Tiggy?

TIGGY: Of course I'm sure. (*Footsteps stop*) Roy!

(*Opens door of room*)

Roy! Where are you? Oh, he's hiding somewhere. Roy, we heard you. Come out.

ROY: Here I am.

TIGGY: Oh, you gave me a fright! Where were you hiding?

LETTICE: Hallo, Roy, had a nice trip? Come and sit down. That will be all for now, Tiggy.

TIGGY: Good.

LETTICE: I said that will be all for now, Tig-gee.

TIGGY: Good. Well I'll just relax and talk to Roy. We've been worried about you, Roy, coming through this fog. I quite expected your plane to be cancelled. You don't look too well, are you all right?

LETTICE: Ring down and ask them to send up the menu, Tiggy.

ROY: I had something to eat on the plane, thanks.

LETTICE: Pour yourself a drink, Roy. You don't look very well. Are you all right?

ROY: I feel a little frail, Auntie.

LETTICE: Poor boy. What will you drink?

ROY: Nothing, thanks.

TIGGY: It's the effect of the paraffin fumes. Roy has not got a strong stomach, Dame Lettice, at the best of times.

LETTICE: I don't mind the stove. Not a bit.

TIGGY: I say, Roy, did you get it fixed up? You know what I mean.

ROY: Oh, yes, most successfully.

TIGGY: Hooray! He's got the job.

LETTICE: What job?

ROY: A job with a tourist agency. They were most impressed by my knowledge of languages.

LETTICE: Whatever has come over you, Roy? There is no need for you to take a job with a tourist agency.

ROY: I wanted to be independent and get married to Tiggy, that's all.

TIGGY: There you see, Dame Lettice, what did I tell you?

LETTICE: Marry Tiggy! But Tiggy is . . . her teeth . . .

TIGGY: Just a moment, just a moment, Dame Lettice. It will be a much healthier life for Roy, taking tourists round Europe in the summer months and returning to a faithful and capable wife in the winter. You know I'm capable, Dame Lettice. You know . . .

LETTICE: Not another penny of mine do you get, Roy.

ROY: I don't need another penny.

TIGGY: And if I win the Quiz – oh, if I win the Quiz – won't we have a party!

LETTICE: Sit down and compose yourself, Tiggy. Roy, you look dreadfully pale. Are you all right? Let me feel your pulse.

ROY: No, no. I haven't got a pulse.

TIGGY: Poor Roy! Let *me* feel your . . .

ROY: Stand back. I haven't got a pulse.

LETTICE: Oh, something has happened to Roy.

TIGGY: Roy! Oh Roy, I can see through you.

LETTICE: I hope he can see through *you*, Tiggy.

TIGGY: I can see right through him and out at the other side. Look! there's the back of the sofa and the wall behind him. He looks like a ghost. See, Dame Lettice, he's transparent.

LETTICE: Stand up, Roy, there's something the matter with you.

TIGGY: Turn round, Roy, let me have a look . . . this murky room . . .

LETTICE: Come over here, Roy, under the light . . .

TIGGY: Take no notice of her, Roy. Just stand still a minute and let me see . . .

LETTICE: Tiggy, don't interfere. Over here, Roy, till I look at

. . . oh, Tiggy, oh, he's quite insubstantial, like the fog. Whatever is the matter with you, Roy?

ROY (*voice rather hollow and 'sinister' from this point*): The plane did crash, Tiggy. Ten minutes ago. I was killed in the crash.

LETTICE: Oh, Roy, you are not a ghost, are you?

ROY: Well, yes, Auntie, as a matter of fact, yes, I am. But it won't make much difference, will it? I mean to say . . .

LETTICE: I am going to faint.

ROY: So is Tiggy. Tiggy's going to faint, a knowledgeable girl like Tiggy! Oh, I wish you wouldn't both faint. I mean to say, what are you going to do when you come round again?

Do you like Flounder?

A talk with Françoise Sagan

▶*Your fourth book is 188 pages long, exactly like the others. Is this a coincidence?*

Two explanations: I am through on page 188; I am short winded.

▶*And again you describe the same milieu? This is a classic reproach.*

Naturally, I wouldn't dare describe a milieu that I don't know. Besides, that doesn't seem to me very important. The reactions of people, at least in the kind of situations that I describe, are always the same.

▶*Does theme, for you, always come first?*

Yes. Two themes, always the same: love and solitude. Actually, I should rather say solitude and love.

▶*Why this correction?*

Because my principal theme is solitude. Love, in some way, is the kill-joy.

▶*Why don't you ever write about your characters in their relations with their work?*

Because their work does not seem to me essential to the flow of the narrative. The work of a human being, if it seems fascinating to me in Zola's books, for example, or stimulating in *Lucien Leuwen*, doesn't interest me in my own books.

It's a shame, because perhaps I could get up to 200 pages.

▶*You started* Aimez-Vous Brahms *all over after having finished it, didn't you? And this is the first time. What was the problem?*

There was a minor character who falsified the problem. A young girl. Simon's cousin, whom Roger was falling in love with, like that, vaguely. This quadrille was somewhat irritating . . .

▶Aimez-Vous Brahms *is therefore your first book without a young girl. Are you giving up this character?*

Not only have I given her up, but I have demolished her. I am tired of the idea some people have of the young girls in my books. There even is a caricature of the young girl, James Dean style, cigarettes, whisky, free-love, in *Aimez-Vous Brahms*.

▶*How come? You're not like that anymore?*

Insolent question [she laughs]. I have never been like that. All the characters walk about with things, it is not the things which define the characters. It's the character who makes use of them according to his own will. Each his own paraphernalia.

▶*What is the meaning of your title?*

For me it summarizes the book. It deals with a woman of forty who is asked suddenly one morning, 'Do you like Brahms?' It

is a question you are asked when you're twenty, a young man's question.

▶*What questions are you asked at twenty? And what later, according to you?*

At twenty they ask, 'Do you believe in God?' 'Do you like Nietzsche, or Brahms?' – questions that have nothing to do with private and daily life. These are questions that you pass aside later, that you discuss less and less, that you forget. Afterwards you're asked, 'Do you like flounder?' 'Have you seen such and such a film?' 'Whom are you sleeping with?'

▶*Even so, the theme of your book is not youth?*

No, it's when it leaves you, it's when you begin to give up . . .

▶*You almost speak about youth with nostalgia. At twenty-four . . .*

Twenty-four is no longer twenty. At nineteen, if you like, I could have been completely changed by someone or I could have discovered something through someone: now I don't think I could anymore. I could change my way of life, be happy or unhappy, but I can no longer change a set of reflexes which is me. I can no longer be modified except by myself.

▶*You are always with the same people. If not the same, at least with others who are identical. Isn't that why you have somewhat this impression?*

First of all, there are fifty of these people. Even if I saw only five, it would be the same. People have the same worries, the same problems, the same fear of dying, or of living, or of wasting their time.

▶*One can't write without sometimes wondering what place one holds in literature. Where do you think you stand?*

From a material point of view, I play a role in the publishing industry. In literature, I don't know . . . I can't say . . . I try to write decent books . . . To know whether they are good literature, I don't know . . . I pray for it.

▶*Are you interested in the experiments of certain young writers, like Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, etc.?*

No. I like *Martereau* by Nathalie Sarraute very much. But formal experiments bore me. I think the important thing for a writer is to have a tone, an opinion, that one feels a human being behind him and that he should be, if not inimitable, in any case recognizable.

▶*In what direction are you going to work now?*

I would love to write novels in which there would be fewer and fewer dramatic situations, more and more daily life, small

everyday squabbles. It's the only direction, if I may say so, that I would like to follow forever. Because, that's where drama is. External events are always accidents. Drama is to get up, to go to bed, to move about in between, to let oneself go. Drama is daily life . . . From time to time, you are conscious of it, but not very often. In the evening, in your bed, when you're alone, when you're sad . . .

▶ *You once said that your favourite book was always your latest. Is that true of* Aimez-Vous Brahms*?*

Yes. The first was the first, consequently indisputable. It was full of trumps that fascinated people, a certain silliness in the use of 'I'. The second was rather easy to do, it's the one I like least. I enjoyed the third very much. I was giving up straight narrative, there were twelve characters, the readers were confused; it was the black sheep, in a certain way my guinea-pig. I liked it. This one is still warm, I prefer it to the others, there aren't any strings . . . I believe that this one at last is somewhat 'human', if this word still exists.

▶ *One last question: Do you believe that a novelist can and should, through his work, try to contribute to the transformation of society? Would you want that?*

I don't believe I can have any influence, first of all because I am a woman, and secondly because I have no political background. Sartre, for example, has a potential for work and an intelligence which allow him to write novels and to take part in what's happening. Not me. There are things that I hate and newspapers and people that I could never read or see, but it's mainly a negative attitude. Many people think that this isn't enough. I don't know who is right . . . Morally, it doesn't bother me, or it bothers me like not being able to fly. I would love to fly. Socially, it bothers me, since it is impossible for me not to be sensitive to certain horrors, but I can always believe that in a more crucial situation, or which seems to me more crucial, more tragic if you like, I would not hesitate.

Translated by Anne Borchardt
Courtesy of L'Express

Poems by Richard Eberhart

A NEW ENGLAND BACHELOR

My death was arranged by special plans in Heaven
And only occasioned comment by ten persons in Adams, Mass.
The best thing ever said about me
Was that I was deft at specifying trump.
I was killed by my father
And married to my mother
But born too early to know what happened to me,
And as I was an only child
I erected selfishness into a personal religion,
Sat thinking forty years saying nothing.
I observed all. I loved to drink gin,
Would not have thought to go farther
Into arcane episodes of the heavier drugs,
And, being New England, always remained sober.
However, I confess now, I was
Always afraid of women,
I don't know why, it was just the way it was,
I could never get very close to any woman.
Knowledge and intelligence allowed me
The grand rationalization of this; also, I respected
Delicacy, but would not go too far in any direction.
I thought I was a good man. I was.
I did not obstruct the state, nor religion,
But I saw through both and maintained my independence.
I kept my own counsels among the learned.
My learning was more private and precious than worldly.
The world had no sense of the devious,
So my private vicissitudes were mine alone.

I say all this with a special sort of grace
For I avoided many of the pitfalls of fallen man
And while I did not have heroic size, the
Creative grandeur, nor mastership of the mind
I earned my bread by cynicism alone,
And blow you all a kiss from the tomb.

THE GODS OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

I was wondering about the gods
As I was walking down Constitution Avenue
For always since I was a boy
I was conscious of the gods in the offing,

Always off there somewhere in the air,
Never immediate and satisfactory,
Yet indubitably the master stuff
And living and seeing of our being,

And now here on Constitution Avenue,
With memorial buildings austere and white,
I wondered about the gods of the world,
Their existence, their glory, and their authority.

The gods were so plural and so vague,
Yet so powerful and so composite
That I was perplexed on Constitution Avenue
Even as I had been perplexed as a boy

And nurture this poem about the gods,
Who spring and leap out of our blood,
As one still seeking for definition
At odds with, but admitting the gods

And if they were a fallacy or illusion
May they go back before their birth,
But if they were a sovereign fact and a conclusion
May they state their case and return

For in this century of delicate balance
We have need of the gods of the air,
Stout gods, stubborn as bony man,
But we ought to know whether they are there.

Jason

by Malcolm Bradbury and Barry Spacks

This was in the summer of 1955, a hot summer for London. Heat rose in spirals from the pavements. Milk soured. In the parks and gardens grass dried, and an official drought was declared. It was weather for the partly alive, weather for those who felt only small gusts of love or contempt, who believed nothing, schemed no good fortune. It was a sad, empty time for Jason Berg.

He was twenty-three. He weighed a bit too much. The more than usual success of his precocious first novel the year before had given him this trip to Europe in its wake, a few commissions from magazines, and the knowledge that he might soon die. He had a heart fissure. In New York the doctors had talked already about a second operation. *Everything belongs to us*, he had written. *Everything but this moment, this speed in my blood as I touch your face and the dusk is betrayed again to darkness. Lamps come on, and I know that desire is ours, and memory; life alone escapes us*. That he would return to the States, that the operation would be a triumph, that he would not die – all this he had no way of knowing then. Heat ricocheted among the buildings, and he wanted nothing so much as to sleep.

He met Estelle at a party in the Battersea flat of Marianne Vogt, friend-of-a-friend, buck-toothed, tall, almost rich enough to live as sloppily as she did. Marianne had a cheerfulness that one could drown in. She greeted Jason exuberantly at the door. He had arrived before dark, when the streets were mellow gold in the waning sun. Marianne knew nothing about the doctors. No one knew. At first he had treated himself, in imagination, to the heroic role of the dying young author, gaiety unflagged, out of a movie by Faith Baldwin with musical effects in the capable hands of F. Chopin. But it made sense to keep quiet, of course. There were a million reasons to keep quiet, the strongest being that he didn't wish to think about it, and the best that he was sure nobody could possibly, not for a moment, really care one way or the other.

'You brought a bottle!' Marianne said. 'Liqueur?' She looked up blinking from the label.

'The man at the store told me it was an aphrodisiac.'

'Oh, that's wonderful, then,' said Marianne. She made him take his coat off. 'You'll never find it again,' she said.

It became that sort of party. People of all ages in a flat looking out over Battersea Park and Battersea Power Station and the river, everything aglow in the Swedish light of a full moon. The place was horribly dirty. No one cleaned it. In a corner a grandfather clock, leaning awry, ticked away at a steady measure,

noting the passage of drink and talk. Someone dropped a bottle of gin in the hall. At midnight, when the first guests were leaving, new ones still arrived. The landlord, who had come in to complain about the noise, stayed on. 'What nice people,' he said. 'What *nice* people.'

Marianne called to Jason over the noise: 'There's a girl here who wants to meet you. Estelle Norton. She read something you wrote and disliked it.' Estelle came over, tanned, richly shaped, set sharply in focus by a dress of pink candy stripe cut low in front. They were introduced and she stole them a chair from someone who had lurched up to dance. She looked at him. Then she sat in his lap. He did not know what to do. She seemed warm and expensive, like his imaginings of an Italian mistress.

'Let me look in your mouth.'

She insisted. She wanted to see if their gum-charts matched. It turned out they were twin souls. 'Do you believe in predestination?' she asked. He nodded.

'May I?'

He peered cautiously into her mouth. Nothing blew up. Warming to their intimacy, he inspected the contents closely. 'Very good,' he said. She laughed appreciatively, and he felt grief – he had no chance with such a woman; she might be ten years older than he. For the moment it seemed ugly of him to be near her, to be warmed by her vigor. She asked him why he looked so sad. 'I don't know,' he said. 'I didn't even know I did.' She got out her compact and made him look into the mirror. 'See?' she said. 'And I know why. You understand about this, how it isn't real.'

'The party?'

'You don't have to pretend,' she said eagerly.

'But it's probably as real as anything else.'

'No,' she said, 'I'm the same, I see through it all. No one cares, you know. Not really.' Then she began to speak very rapidly, telling him that parties made her cry because they were so sad. Fake bright oases in the desert of the world. Her eyes were wet; her head rested on his shoulder and he placed his arm about her waist. He didn't know what to say. He said uneasily that they were all victims of a vast Joker who whirled men about and about. His mind had become hazy. He knew it was the heat and drink that turned life more random than usual. His ears buzzed and he felt out of touch with himself. In the flat people laughed and sang.

Then he and Estelle were somehow in the kitchen and Marianne Vogt came in, putting on the overhead light. She giggled and said they'd picked the best place; the bedrooms were crowded out. 'Who was it I came with?' Estelle demanded vaguely. Marianne said she didn't remember because her mind had stopped working at nine. 'Never mind,' said Estelle, 'tell him I've been called to a fire.' Jason asked quickly where he could get a haircut; he said his head was too heavy to carry around any more with all his hair on it. Estelle told Marianne it was a lovely party and a lovely kitchen, that Marianne had on a lovely dress. 'Someone wants lemon in their *vermut*,' said Marianne, opening the refrigerator door and slicing a lemon. 'Sheer affectation,' said Estelle. 'Shall I put the light out?' asked Marianne. 'Yes, please.'

When she had gone they found greater sadness than ever, in the sweet transience of the first tentative moments of love. There they were, together at a single point in space and time . . . someone could easily break in upon them, switch on the light.

He thought: I don't deserve this. He tried to say so, but she forced him to be quiet. Later – it seemed to Jason much later – they went quite naturally out the window and down the fire-escape; there was a moment of total confusion; then they took a taxi to a late, licensed restaurant which Estelle chose because she was in love with one of the waiters, a handsome Italian who came over, ignoring Jason completely, smiling brightly, saying, 'Good evening, Signora, it is good to have you here again. You have done your hair differently, I see. I like it.'

'Do you really, Roberto?' said Estelle.

'Very nice,' said Roberto. 'How brown you are.'

'We're going to have something exotic to drink,' she said. She ordered for both of them, dropping the waiter with one of her strange shifts of attention, turning to Jason. 'There, that's him. I'm hopelessly fond of him, and he just knows it. He's rather horrible, isn't he?'

'That's his great asset, I imagine,' said Jason. He could see this was all going to be very expensive and felt subtly into his wallet to determine how much money he had; fortunately he had cashed a check that day from a magazine for a review. The book he had reviewed was entitled *Footnote to the Long Run: the Future of American Letters*.

'Where do you live?' he asked. She refused to tell him. He dropped to banalities. 'Do you come here often?' 'Quite often.'

'Do you go out a lot?' 'Yes,' she said, 'I'm always going somewhere or other.'

His doubt as to his capacity to handle her grew; if the business with the waiter had annoyed him, this invoked a deeper perturbation, for he was, in contrast to her, a recluse, a visitor of picture-galleries and libraries, a detestor of flux, of that active society which failed to offer close relationships. Personal events were everything, he believed.

'I'd be bored if I did what you do,' said Estelle. 'Write, I mean. I need lots of people, lots of friends.'

'Do you have a lot of friends?' he asked.

'I know a lot of men,' she said. 'I'm quite promiscuous, you understand.'

He did not reply. What could one say to that? They watched the meal, cooked beside them on a wagon, and then began to eat in silence. Sobered, he felt sure she found him hopelessly boring. Then she suddenly asked: 'Do you like me?'

'Yes, of course I do. I like you very much.'

'Why?' she demanded, and did not give him time to answer. 'I must be twice your age,' she said.

'You're not! And what does it matter?'

She smiled whimsically and touched his hand.

While he paid the bill she went off to the ladies' room and he sat uncomfortably at the table awaiting her. Of course, she wouldn't like me, he thought. Why should she? Her perfume was still in the air. Her fingerprints stood out on the wineglass and her gloves lay on the table. There remained closely with him the sensation of her bright clothes, her smile – against this he tested himself and was aware of an immense melancholy, forbidding what ran more deeply, a daring excessive for him, a desire to embark on a relationship whose exact shape, the nature of whose crescendo, whose emotional texture, was not within his grasp. For a moment the heroic vision of his death took hold of him, causing an apprehensiveness that might become unbearable, he knew, if he yielded to it. He sipped the last of the wine. She returned, and his feelings cleared, sharpened. As she sat down he examined scrupulously the physical fact of her presence, her hips, the folds of her dress, the skin texture of her bare arms. The fact differed from the dream. 'There, is that better?' she asked brightly. 'Yes', he said, though he saw no difference in her save for a slight thickening of lipstick. 'Wonderful.'

'I'm so late it just isn't true,' she said. He slipped the frail jacket over her shoulders. 'Write down your address,' and while he was doing this: 'Lend me a pound for the taxi, will you?' She took it gracefully. 'How shall I let you have this back? I'll post it to you.'

'Please,' he said, 'forget it. Won't we see each other again?'

'I don't know,' said Estelle. 'Will you come and get me a taxi?'

As the taxi he had signaled gyrated in the road, as a heavy lorry moved by over the slick paving, as he recollected the strangeness of the evening, he tried to kiss her again. 'No,' she said. 'Why?' 'You aren't my sort of person. You mustn't be offended,' she added, seeing that he was, 'you're better than my sort of person, I suppose. But I don't think of you in that way now. I meant it when I said I was promiscuous; I didn't just say it for effect. That is, perhaps in a way I said it for effect, but it's true. So you mustn't fall in love with me, you see.'

'Yes,' he said.

'And you would have, wouldn't you?'

'I don't know,' he said.

'You were nice,' said Estelle. The taxi waited. 'You were a comfort.'

'Do you need comfort?'

'Oh, I do, I do really,' she said. He realized with amazement that she was crying. Gently he held her – pity flowed out from him. At least I have pity, he thought, that comforting superior emotion. The city seemed to weigh on him, and he grieved not for Estelle but for himself. She began to speak rapidly. 'I am sad, you know. There are people and one gives them a little and they give something too. But there should be more than that. I was married once. I didn't like it, but I wish it hadn't failed. After a while you can't be simple any more. You only hope that life will be kind further on. Do you understand that? You try things out and you hope and hope in spite of them. You go to lots of places, see lots of people. You play . . .'

'I understand,' he said. He kissed her lightly on the brow and she clung to him, suddenly, as she had at the party. 'Shall I come . . . ?' he asked. 'No,' she said. 'You'll hear from me, really.'

'When?'

'When?' she repeated. 'Tomorrow? Shall I phone tomorrow?'

'I'd like that,' said Jason. He realized that the taxi meter had been ticking all this time. 'You'd better let me give you another pound,' he said.

'Tomorrow, then.'

'Yes.' He felt strong, wise. They kissed awkwardly. As the taxi took her off she gazed back at him blankly, wide-eyed. He found a tube station but the last train had gone. He walked home along empty streets, the traffic signals blinking as far ahead as he could see. He was unable to remember clearly a word she had said, but the sensation of holding her in his arms and the taste of her lips remained with him so vividly as to seem like pain.

* * *

'I miss you,' she said. The telephone sweated in his hand. It was the next day, noontime. She was at a rehearsal. Did he still . . . ? Oh, yes, he assured her. Would he come by then, that night? As she gave him directions to her flat he gradually became excited. Afterwards he could not eat. He tried to read. Then he went into the bathroom and shaved, very slowly.

He brought her a present, a china statuette of a coy whistling shepherdess which he had seen in a second-hand shop on the way. 'I thought of you as soon as I saw it,' he said.

She smiled. 'That's not entirely a compliment, is it?'

'Isn't it?'

'Well, look how silly she is. Look at that pretentious lift of the head.'

'You don't like it.'

'No,' Estelle said, 'I do. I do, really.'

That good evening, when they found peace and the traffic outside roared past to invoke the contrast of disquiet, and later, from an apartment below, a radio played jazz – that evening was to form the memory of her that returned to him most often. Perhaps it became, ultimately, finer than it was; to him it always seemed their best time; even the shame, the touch of unease and disappointment, were themselves pleasant. The sun went down but the heat of the unbroken drought held on in the shadows, in the walls of the old building where she lived. Then the moon fell into the room, and stayed.

So it began; he would wait for her each night amid the garish neon, the ugly shop windows of Piccadilly Circus, arriving early and trying to sort her face from the crowd of blank and speedy and tired and hostile ones amid the wild traffic. At last she would come, her bright eyes shining, easy amid the endless throng, carrying her

little vanity case packed with sandwich wrappers and her ballet shoes. He would take the case from her. They would go to a restaurant in Greek Street, or buy steak in Old Compton Street and return to cook at her flat. Or to a theatre, ending the evening in the half intimacy of some saloon bar, amid the press of people, the bright lights and shining mirrors. But whatever they did it was of her choosing; it was her London: the Edwardian plush of the theatres and pubs no more belonged to him than the expresso bars or the bearded young men who appeared and disappeared, sailing yachts around the world, working for the *Daily Express* or the Institute of Contemporary Arts; the people she knew, the theatrical types, the programme planner at the BBC, the post-Oxfordian Englishmen who lived in Hampstead and were members of string quartets, seemed to him unreal. Once they spent all their money and she telephoned for a trombonist in the London Symphony to take them home in his M.G. They arrived at the flat tired, quarrelsome, and the gas meter ticked maddeningly, and when he had gone only the thought of the china shepherdess, his memento, standing on top of the bookcase, offered some confirmation of the unlikely fact that he had been there, done this or that, lived as part of her world, felt so, and so. He told himself: I'm this kind of person now. I am the things that I experience. This is my place now, and if I must die soon, at least let me meet events halfway while I can, make them part of me as I am part of them. In his novel, strangely – it seemed strange to him – he had written of this already. *We create all beauty, all love, all goodness, from inside ourselves, if we can, and are ourselves made of what we create.*

He did not even wonder whether he loved her; love was an old word and did not seem to fit any more. He was oppressed by an awareness of human insecurity; out of loneliness and fear he had sought company, release from the dreadful consciousness of the scar on his heart. He merely lived her life. He thought he was grateful that she offered him this much.

* * *

In August she was free and they decided to hire a car and drive down through France, along the Riviera and into Italy. This too was her idea, and he accepted it. They drove from Paris along wet roads, stopped a night at Avignon, filled the back of the car with food and wine and picnicked by the roadside. He let her drive. He

was not a good driver, lacking concentration. They reached the southern coast, and when they found a hotel that Estelle liked they stayed, abandoning Italy. It was then that he found himself possessed by something close to terror. He wanted to go home, at least back to England. He felt apart from the security of his own fate. He was unable to work, as he had planned to do. He felt unreal. Yet, when he escaped from her, when he would go to the beach alone and lie there, he would feel dreadfully lost, so that he had to look for her, get away from the great universal movement of sea and sky that was all there was. He knew she saw his doubts and disorders, disliked his lack of authority with waiters, his compliance with the hoteliers who tried to cheat them, the porters who asked for large tips, that she was pained by his slowness at coming to decisions about where to eat, where to go each day, his inability to invent a good time. And in the bathroom there was his array of pills, making her uneasy. She came over to him on the balcony, well-lotioned, protected with sunglasses; they looked out across the rich sweating vegetation and the rocks to the sea. She said: 'What do you want all those things in the bathroom for?' He told her they were necessary. She pondered this all day, and that evening, as they sat in a cafe in Villefranche, with the harbor waters before them pearly grey and the lights coming on, she demanded, 'You're not sick, are you?'

'Why?' he asked, pleased, as if she might be about to say something, a single word, that magically would make him whole.

'Perhaps we shouldn't do so much,' she said. 'You mustn't get sick.'

'I'm fine,' he said.

'Oh, yes, I know. You'll endure.'

'Would you be sorry if I didn't?' He knew she could never be sorry enough; he wanted someone to feel a sorrow deeper than love when he died. His question seemed to betray to her an inordinate weakness.

'You're morbid, Jason,' she said.

Yes, he had tired, grown less heroic, increasingly aware of the encroachments she was making on him, aware of a disintegration of all he had thought himself to be. And yet she seemed to have more and more to offer. Not only her gaiety, her insights: that lovers' process whereby, as the face of beauty declines when one comes to know the underlying constituents, the myopia, the concealed blemishes and the sweating in the heat, the unflattering

poses usually avoided but not always – with these there came a delight in, a sense of contact through, the weaknesses. He thought that love was at least partly disgust. They were both human, and small; she had been seasick on the cross-channel ferry, she wore a sundress that didn't suit her, was frightened of swimming too far out, looked terrible when her hair was wet. Often, as they lay on the beach or drove along the corniche, her warm soft hand in his, he would glance down and examine this tender construct of bone and sinew, this woman, for what she gave him. He thought of the tenuousness of life, imagining her dead, lying drowned on the sea-edge or smashed in a car, and he would touch her quickly. Sometimes he would put his hand about her waist as they walked, resting it lightly on her hip, feeling the movement of the flesh beneath, her powerful body, the rich architecture of bones and cartilege and arteries, throbbing with the beat of life. He became excessively conscious of her participation in the vital world, among the bright plants, the glowing sun, burning and engendering, the brown figures on the beach, the burnt edges of the leaves. She liked to be smiled at and importuned on the streets, talked to in cafés, approached as she was swimming; she admired herself in shop windows, had him take her photograph, wore provocative swimsuits. And one day, toward the end of the time they had alloted for the trip, as they lay in bed, the window open, music from the casino resounding, she said: 'Are you going to marry me, Jason?'

The surprise was this: he was unsurprised. Though it had come suddenly, without warning, it was as if he had heard the question before, seen it form on her lips and remain unspoken. 'I must tell you something about me,' he said. 'Something I've kept from you.' Calmly, exactingly, he spoke of the trouble with his heart.

'I see,' she said.

'Well?'

'You're as cold as bloody ice,' she cried angrily. 'What sacrifice do you suppose you've been making? What bloody great sacrifice, all this time?'

He seemed to hear his heartbeats pound out. 'Sacrifice?' He could not understand. 'Estelle, I'm very ill.'

'No, don't give me that, Jason. Don't talk any more.'

'But why can't you believe me? It's the only reason, I swear. If you want me even so . . .'

'I don't want you! Why should I want you?'

He'd risen. Standing at the window he looked out at the

wedding-cake decoration of the town, shimmering in the heat. 'Estelle,' he said.

'That's the second time. Do you realize you have never once before called me by my Christian name?'

'Now listen to me! You're going to listen to me!'

She shook her head, and grimly, harshly, in a voice of loss and compassion, she spoke his name. 'You were trapped, weren't you? Ah, Jason. And now you're free. No, I will not talk about it any more.'

She left in the car that afternoon while he wandered desolate on the beach. He returned to the empty room, a misery not only in his mind but in his muscles and intestines. There seemed nothing to do but sit in a place where she had been and plan a future with no choice. He hated himself for feeling, in spite of the pain, an immense sensation of escape. His eyes would not leave the four words of the note she had left him. *You were a comfort.* He wished desperately to cry out to her, in retribution and frustration and relief: Why won't you believe me? I'm dying! Can't you see I'm going to die?

I'm dying he thought.

But now he could not make himself believe this.

Poems by Jack Carey

THE CAVES

Here in the windless world all
Time is mineral that only the slow
Growth of lime records, whose
Creeping inch contracts my span
Into an insect's nothing.
Over the waters which no breath stirs
Hang pinnacles and spires imagination mirrors
As a deathless, dead city,
White lustre of a grassless moon.
Only the flint tool witnesses the fire
That shattered once like glass
The ice of silence where
Primaeval waters burrowed
For the first men their crouching home.
Tool and bone remain
Tribute to the mineral kingdom,
Sepulchral skull
Of the momentary brain.

Outside warm-blooded creatures run
Within those temperatures our kind
Must keep or die, living
Each under the allotted sun.

And yet the city in unflickering
Image lights still the mind while now
Ignorant darkness fills the cave wholly
As always before our coming and the rock
Pool returns no image of the city which
Absence contracts to a glassless mirror's
Nothing.
There
Only
The distilled water drops drip endlessly.

PHOTOGRAPH

She stands there so firm and proud of flesh
In that close gown bracing the live curve
As though nothing could ever break her statuesque
Poise, nothing ever unnerve
The challenge of her looks, her beauty fresh
Still in the faded print, making our blood stir.

And now, in a white ward an old woman lies
Shrunk to the bed-bounds, a child in a high-
Railed cot, a white mist thickening in her eyes,
Their warm lights, slow waters at ebb-tide
Guttered in mud hollows, rekindling as she sees
A bouncing child in the grey son stooping at her side.

I watch the flesh collapsed on the sharp bone.
All here are patiently waiting to die.
Some, at visiting time, conspicuously alone
In the white islands of their beds lie
Motionless, as though their minds were already gone
Out of the world, the lingering, stranded body.

A second childhood no mothering can wean?
One wishes for a timely death to spare
Such burial in ourselves alive, so keen
A sense of loss, of uselessness, aware
Of one's reduction to a problem of hygiene,
In frigid and efficient nursing care.

The China People

by Penelope Farmer

I. THE LOVELY SLUG

Once upon a time there was a slug who longed to be beautiful. His witch mistress thought him perfect already, but then witches are well known for liking the ugliest things the best.

'Oh my precious slimy little darling,' she would croon by the hour, 'my gorgeous ugly duckling.'

Tears used to roll down the little slug's face to hear her so. He hated ugliness. But being a good-hearted creature he said nothing and served her as well and faithfully as he could for many years.

And then, at long last, the witch decided to reward him.

'Whatever you wish most in the world,' said she with a generous leer. 'You may have it, *I* will grant it to you.' For the little slug, half-fainting with joy, it was only a question of deciding on the most beautiful creature he knew, and naming it. The possibilities were endless; birds, beasts, flowers stretched invitingly before him and he considered them all one by one until his horns were nearly spinning in their sockets. But at last he was sure what he wanted to be. 'A blue, blue, butterfly,' he whispered in his muddy slug voice. How he had always envied them, those dancing fairy creatures light as the dandelions, as they sported above his head.

The witch shrugged. 'Of all the wish-wash fancies – !' but she did not want to make him think that she was baffled and so said nothing more until one day in the park she muttered a few strange words over his head, and laying him down slipped silent away, like the shadow of a rook or crow darkening the meadow.

The slug ached all over. At first he could not move himself and he strained and struggled helplessly with his wide blue wings. They felt strange and light and seemed glued together above his body so that he despaired of wresting them open, and sweeping himself where he wanted as he had dreamed he would. He wept, he fought; he despaired still further. Until at last his wings fell apart of their own accord and wafted him over the green grass and over the flowers to play catch-as-catch-can with the wind. The slug was enchanted by the movement. For the first time in his life he felt free like the air or the stars; he could not have enough of this darting to and fro, the pause, the flutter, the skimmering up and away, he was dizzy and drunk with delight, a crazy-spinning flicker of blue in a park on a June gold morning.

Quite soon he found he was no longer alone. A whole cloud of blue butterflies were spinning with him as though in the pattern

of a dance or ballet. They were all different shades of blue, with only the subtle difference of kingfisher or speedwell or forget-me-not between them. As they danced and met and fell apart again they talked in butterfly whispers of pollen and flowers, greeted other butterflies, red or brown or summer yellow ones and exchanged butterfly wisdom in voices like grass in the wind.

'So short, so short,' they sighed, 'to die in a day, to live, to love, to die in a day, die, die, so short, so short,' they sighed to one another, and fluttered their blue wings together.

In midflight it dawned on the slug what they had said, 'Die in a day!' It could not be possible. Surely it was not true. He began to regret his decision and to flutter desperately to escape his fate. But the knowledge still clung to him, blotting out all joy – to die in a day! When at last he could bear it no longer he flew away from them to where he could see his witch mistress lying asleep stretched out in a rusty black heap on a park bench amid the ice-cream papers.

'Well,' said the witch when she awoke. 'Not satisfied, hey?'

'To die in a day, no, no!' whispered the slug faintly from her cloak. 'I don't want to die.'

The witch chuckled. She did not say I told you so, but the unhappy slug could feel the words quivering in the palm of her skinny hand as she whispered her queer spells over him once more and restored him to his fat slug body.

'Learnt your lesson, hey?' she inquired maliciously, 'what do you want now?'

This time it took the slug a week to decide, because although he knew there must be perfection somewhere, he was not sure what it was. Then one night, during a spell session under the full moon, there came from the darkness of a nearby wood a burst of song that bewitched him so completely, that almost without thought he cried out to the witch.

'I want to be a nightingale.'

And thus it was he found himself, perched high above the ground in a beech-grove, with black and silver markings on his dull brown wings where the pattern of leaves mingled with the moonlight upon them. Music swelled in his throat. He opened his beak and the notes poured forth one after another, an effortless agony of sound, burning through him as though they were liquid silver, but not cold and distant as the moonlight; the sadness of them was unbearable. Round him the steep black shadows of the branches became cage bars imprisoning him; he struggled, he could not get

out; and his song poured forth all the while; even the release of that ceased at last because his tongue grew tired, he could only mouth at the pain which swelled ever more inside him, and it was agony. He found he could bear it no longer; blundering from his branch, he winged his way painfully through the moonlit trees down to the end of the grove to find the witch still making her magic, and much as on that first occasion he collapsed at her feet. His eyes were glazed, but his beak, empty of song, grasped firmly at her black and frowsty cloak, and she turned at last to remove the spell as he demanded. Then she took him back to her little house in the city. This second time it was she who was the first to mention wishes and rewards again.

He was to be given one more chance to find his perfection. Nearly a fortnight passed, however, before he could even bring himself to consider the problem, and then he began to grow restless again. But he could not find his perfection anywhere. He was considering the problem, rather despairingly one day from his position in the witch's bosom on her return journey from the market place, when he heard the noise of cheering and popped his head up just in time to see the most wonderful sight he had ever imagined.

It was an enormous gilded coach, its painted belly swelling with importance, attended by powdered footmen and drawn by a team of prancing grey horses. 'The king! the king!' cried the crowd, its hats off, its eyes agog, 'The king! God bless your Majesty!' and 'God bless your little highness.' From his vantage point the slug caught sight of a red-faced man in a crown bowing and smiling from the windows and besides him a quite extraordinarily beautiful little girl. She had long golden hair and wide blue eyes and cheeks as pink as the flowers of that name in June; and she was laughing and waving and blowing kisses across the street as though she was quite the happiest soul alive.

'Oh my, oh my,' breathed the slug, enraptured, all the way home. 'She can't have a care in the world and she's young, and she's the most beautiful of all beauties. Please, please, give me looks and clothes and a golden coach just like hers,' he pleaded, 'Oh, my!'

The witch turned pale, but she would not admit defeat. She searched and searched through her books, through the most revolting of her ingredients, brought out vials and boxes and queer yellow papers full of crabbed writing and corked the results of it

all in a strange green flask with a stopper made out of stone from a graveyard, carved with vines and mysterious ciphers. She swelled with self-satisfaction at her success.

Before the slug had had time to think she had turned him into a little human princess just like the other, hair like a ripe cornfield, eyes blue lakes, had clothed him in silks and satins and set him down carefully in his own palace boudoir.

At first he overflowed with joy. He was enchanted when servants bowed low to him, he loved strolling in formal gardens and stately chambers where lake and mirror in turn reflected him, he adored eating rare dishes off gold and silver plates served on bended knee; but it began to occur to him at the same time that the life of a princess was rather harder than had at first appeared. There were such tiresome matters as lessons for example; in constitutional history, in dry dim political science, in geography, in French, in philosophy, in astronomy and astrology and mathematics; of all of which he understood little and learnt less. Every morning under the stern supervision of a knowledgeably boring governess, he sat in his dark panelled schoolroom while other children laughed in the streets outside. Then there were equally weary hours of dancing and deportment when he performed stately antics to the music of solemn musicians or paraded with an encyclopaedia on his head, the discipline of which was loathsome to a slow and slouchy slug; and then the ceremonial and the robes and the endless mirrored minutes while yet more maids combed his hair yet another time, or dabbed more scent behind his ears, or made another braid tighter or straightened his coronet, or changed him from one uncomfortable robe of silk or satin into another of cat-piled velvet.

And still he must smile and be gracious. 'Princesses never have tantrums', observed his governess one day in the middle of his tearful protest at the impossibility of his astronomy homework. 'Nor do they have stomachache' admonished his starched nurse after he had eaten too much marchpane at luncheon time.

One blazing summer's morning his head felt as though it would burst. He flew into a tantrum with his governess and was whipped; every one of his sums came wrong, and to crown everything, the little dog he loved whimpered in a corner and died. The princess, erstwhile slug, was deciding that the only possible course was to retire to bury his head in the cool of a pillow when his majesty the king sent royal word that he wished for a royal progress,

and that his little daughter was to be ready at twelve o'clock to accompany him on a tour of the city in the golden state coach.

'Hurry, hurry, you must don your scarlet taffeta, your Highness, your diamond coronet and your ermine cape, his Majesty's express desire, your Royal Highness. Hasten, hasten.' Behind his back, the lips of his chief lady-in-waiting were pursed with dislike for the pother of mid-morning ceremonial. It made her no gentler in her ministrations, but he dared not complain. She was a formidable woman.

'And your Royal Highness, you must be scented and jewelled and powdered to look prettier than ever in your life before. Smile sweetly, your Royal Highness, as you have been taught. A princess is always laughing, how often have we taught you that!'

His head whirled and throbbed, it was all a bad dreadful dream. Words, words, laugh, smile, drove through his mind like so many galloping horses and gave orders to his lips which ached with the effort. Just as the princess he had seen on that day long past, he drove through the town in a golden coach, bowing and smiling and kissing his hand to the crowds as though he had not a care in the world. But inside he ached all over.

He escaped that very night. He crept out of the palace, passed the guards and fled home to the witch's house in its mean street. He remained there as a slug for the rest of his life. If nostalgia did overcome him on some occasions it did not take long to repress it, and he was comparatively content. But when he died, from the crumb of soil his body fertilized, a little tree, a silver birch, grew up. Its leaves danced together like a crowd of butterflies; it had a trunk like moonlight and shadow and from a distance it might have been a slender princess swaying in a minuet, gracefully. As for the witch, nothing grew on her grave except fungi, and that was loathsome.

II. THE SUITOR'S COW

Once upon a time there was a princess who pretended to be a cow. She was an orphan and had beech-leaf hair and eyes like chestnuts. She ruled a land of peace, with towns and villages, mountains, mines and lakes in plenty. And above all a people that could, like all peoples, be wise or stupid in turn, but was mainly loyal.

With so many advantages, with her beauty and with her riches, it was not surprising that would-be servants and suitors swarmed round her like flies on a sticky cake.

'Would your Royal Highness like this? or that? or the other?' they asked.

'Your Royal Highness if I may so say is looking too *ravishing* today.'

'Allow *me*, your Royal Highness!'

The princess luckily had a sense of humour. Sometimes when compliments flowed too freely she would retire to her room and laugh till she cried. Her godmother, however, observed with dismay that the princess, despite her humour, was beginning to grow a little more arrogant and a little less sensible every day, and decided that matters had gone far enough.

She was a large woman with a crooked nose and the manner of a duchess which really hid the flustered mind of a maiden aunt. She lived in a pseudo-romantic cottage in the twentieth century, but travelled as happily from century to century, as most people from town to town, except that she was sometimes prone to travel sickness.

Slightly green in the face, therefore, as a result of her journey, she appeared one morning in the age of princesses outside the gardens where the lords and ladies strolled, and demanded to see her god-daughter.

The sentries, who had had a healthy respect for her since the day she turned one of them into an air-traveller for five minutes, let her in immediately.

'Christabella,' she said, 'it is quite time you married, and threw out these crowds of doubtful suitors. I promised your dear father that I would see you did so in a fitting manner and so far nothing has been arranged. Come now, has no one taken your fancy?'

Her stately figure paced up and down the chamber like a guard on parade, but her mind was away and waltzing with the fascinating problem of matrimony, round and round, swirl after giddy swoop and coming with a graceful curtsey to a close.

'And above all he must be kind and forbearing to Man and Beast; and that, Christabella, is your ideal husband.'

'Turn me into a cow,' said the princess.

'Do *what*?' said her fairy-godmother.

'Turn me into a cow,' said the princess. 'I should love to see them milking me.'

Her fairy-godmother, although appalled at the idea, was soon convinced of the wisdom of testing in some way those who swarmed round the royal apartments.

In the town there lived a farmer who had a fine herd of dairy cows, with coats of dun-colour, and eyes like dark wells, soft and shining. The fairy paid him a discreet visit that morning and hired his most beautiful animal, a delicate creature by the name of Daisy.

The next day, the attendants who went to call the princess were astonished to find on the pillow, instead of the expected tawny head, only the anxious eyes and curved horns of a small jersey cow.

'Your princess,' said the note tied to her studded collar, 'until my further pleasure. Signed Rumpellina, Godmother-in-Chief to her Highness.'

The whole palace was immediately in an uproar. But when it gradually began to dawn in each favour-scrabbling head that here was the chance to show devotion, loyalty, generosity, integrity, in fact all the qualities suitable for those surrounding a princess, the cow became the centre of an attention received neither before nor since by any cow.

At precisely eight o'clock a knock would come on the door of the royal apartments. 'Time to arise, your Royal Highness.' Whereupon six fine court ladies, who had never entered a farmyard in their lives, would gently assist the little dun-coloured cow from the bed with its crested curtains. Into a golden bucket she was milked by a dairy-maid from the palace stables – a pretty humble little creature, suddenly elevated to a great position and an honorary rank by the palace crisis. A chain of silver, jewel-studded, would be set about the cow's neck, a dish of fresh swathed grass, flower-studded like jewellery, placed before her, and she would breakfast with anxious lords and ladies fluttering round to see that she had everything she wanted.

In the audience-chamber where she was led at ten o'clock in the morning there were mirrors – rows and rows glittering on every wall so that whichever way the nervous suitor looked there were eyes always on him; elegant, gilt chairs were there too; and at one end an enormous throne with a canopy for the ruler. That presented the main problem. How could a cow sit down on it?

They put the state robes of ermine round her, stuck the coronet a little rakishly between her horns and with respectful faces pondered the problem.

'And what would your Royal Highness prefer?'

But her Royal Highness of course could not answer. She merely stood there gentle-faced, placidly chewing, while they pushed and pulled from behind and in front as much as they dared with so royal a personage; but how hard they found it to be efficient when to grasp a horn with too much assurance or to talk cow-language too energetically could mean loss of future favour; as for slapping a princess on the rump, that was naturally out of the question!

When she was settled at last, then the courtiers, the suitors, the lords, the ladies poured in, poured out, bowed, curtseyed and raised their hands in suitable admiration.

'Your Royal Highness has such delightful originality this morning,' and 'Her imagination so brilliant, and those soft delicious eyes, and my *dear* the elegant curve of those horns,' and 'Pray allow me to congratulate you in an ode on the *ravishing* texture of your coat, your Royal Highness.'

The cow looked on with soft mild eyes and bewilderedly raised her head to the skies and mooed.

'So musical,' they said.

The real princess and her godmother laughed invisibly until their sides ached, and they went on laughing until they actually wept, and the fairy almost forgot to hold fast to the spell of invisibility. Soon, however, she turned more firmly to the princess.

'This is getting us nowhere, Christabella, we still don't know whom you should wed.'

'Simple,' said the princess, who was not a chatterbox. 'I will reappear.' Which she did; at five o'clock in the throne room, during the royal reception. The courtiers were dumbfounded to see her standing there in the middle of the floor, and stared first at her and then at the cow without saying a word. A fat count still held the cow's hoof carefully and reverently in his hand, while two courtiers unaware were kneeling obsequiously on the steps of the throne, the flattering words dying on their lips.

Next moment pandemonium broke loose. The princess was surrounded, the small cow left lonely. When it occurred to them how they had been tricked, the courtiers laughed politely, praised her humour, but they were not pleased, and they went to the cow and, calling footmen and servants told them disdainfully to remove her, slapping and pushing her as they had not dared to do before. Only one tall silent young man went to her head and spoke comforting words.

As is correct in all fairy tales he was the handsomest prince in the room, heir to a rich kingdom and as sincere as all the others were false; in fact for some time the princess had been watching him and wondering whether she could love him, and now she had made sure.

And so they married. For many years they lived happily together and produced rows of charming children with all the qualities of their parents and none of their faults. As for the cow, she was kept in a special golden stall with a field attached until the day she died. And to this day whenever a man of their town is being particularly silly or affected, someone is sure to turn to him and say, 'Why George (or Bill or Harry), you're stupid enough today to flatter a cow!'

The Face

by John Hall Wheelock

He was aware, in his dream, of a face bending over his – a face, neither man's nor woman's, of such transcendent beauty, force, laughing tenderness, and delight as marked it not of this earth. A pang, some premonition of death itself, struck through him and he struggled, but his struggles served only to increase the sense of gradual absorption into another being and of the dissolution of his own. The very core of his selfhood seemed about to be dissolved away, and he started up in frenzy, when that Face of inexorable compassion transfixed him with a smile, a glance, so divine, that in an instant all was comprehended. He yielded; his heart overflowed, pouring on to meet that exultant love. And, in that instant, as he surrended what so desperately, since the hour of birth, he had fought to preserve, it became clear to him that this was the goal toward which, without knowing it, he had, his whole life long, been labouring with every breath he drew. Time fell away. All consciousness of self was lost. There remained only the Face and his adoration of it. Then this, too, passed. He had become part of what he loved.

Trez

Solomon Grundy

A Poem for My Son, at Bedtime by David R. Slavitt

I

Pity and terror are not for little boys
who neither want nor need nor can enjoy
the agonies of Job, the blind tears
of Oedipus, or Hamlet sung to rest by angels.
Let us rehearse the tale of a good man
who lived and died in virtue and some fame,
whose tame and common truth is smooth with telling,
yet hard and fast as ever truth was told.

Solomon Grundy was born, thereafter christened,
and married in due course. Some years went by
and Mr. Grundy, husband, Christian, man,
took ill, was worse in sickness, and he died.
His people laid him in earth; his epitaph
was simple: this is the end of Solomon Grundy.

II

We know little of him. Those few events
of which we do have evidence tell nothing.
His life, like Shakespeare's, stands in bas-relief:
birth, christening, marriage, death, and stone.
No evil that he did lives after him,
and yet he is remembered. Although no
records tell of any title, office,
commission, honor, real property,
nor court reports make mention of his business,
small children say his rime and bounce a ball
in private rhythms (each of them his end).

Solomon Grundy, born, married and died . . .
his study is the limit of our knowing,
who read ourselves in him: a name in time.

III

He lived the days of the week that are our days;
his face is with the faces on our mantle
and in our albums, in dated, formal poses,
monuments to our passing.
Born on Monday,
married (and the date engraved in the gold) . . .
as if by such devices we could claim
the date itself, capture the day as ours
on calendars, in almanacs, forever.

Solomon Grundy was buried on Sunday – the children,
all the endless children say it, smiling,
who know the ends of rimes and weeks and men,
simple as that. And mourn for none of them.

IV

Your eyes have closed and at the edge of sleep
you hear my voice, cozy as a blanket,
ramble on in the dark with a grim tale
of sickness and inexorable death
which you find full of symmetry and rhythm
and comforting.
When Mr. Grundy died,
that Saturday with all his days commingled,
like my words now, into one afternoon,
a texture on his bed, a monotone,
he knew this was no tale for a little boy,
with scenes arranged around a catafalque
showing us mortal men and full of death,
nor for a father, either, whose deep voice
has lost the sing-song tune.
But you and I
must meet in the confusion of his sunset
the boundary of time and its own verge.

Triste

by Eric Cashen

Oval Perilsoeur lived in the top flat of what one would call an apartment house in Paris. She lived alone save for a cat, two bookcases, and a rubber truncheon. She was a loner. As morning approached she opened both windows wide into the high air and breathed deeply. This was life. She adored it.

At breakfast another manniken asked her, 'What do you do for love, cherie?' She winked broadly and smiled, inviting confidences.

'Oh, I . . .' Oval blushed. 'I do anything that comes to mind.'

Work, for Oval, was like opium to the young. She enjoyed her job. Nothing else. Just nine hours and lunch. Soon it would be over. The day would end. She would go back to her apartment and lie down on her bed and weep. She had no lover.

Octavius Perrault was a young man about town. He was a musician, a composer. He lived a free life with the prostitutes and sirens and when the sun came up was too tired to compose. But he kept in the best society. He followed the fashion. He had money.

One day a friend, Gustave Cremier, took him to see a display of dresses. 'Maybe you will buy one for your sweetheart.' The shop was resplendent in gay drapes of orange satin. The floor was waxed. A marble dais had been placed in the center of the room. The designer signalled and girls appeared from side doors. They wore the most astonishing materials. Some were creped in black. Others hoofed in scarlet shoe leather. One appeared in a velvet so charming, so pearly white, that Octavius did not notice her face for a moment. 'Ah!' he shouted and clapped his hands. 'Bravi.'

Gustave nudged him in the ribs. 'Do you know her? Come, I will introduce you.' Octavius went, his heart fluttering. He hadn't ever had a sweetheart.

They brought the piano in by knocking out the wall next to the doorway. Octavius was ecstatic. It was a Playel. Oval stood behind him, dressed in her best borrowed frock, and smiled at the sculptured mass of dark wood and ivory. 'I am jealous,' she thought to herself, 'very jealous.' She thought to herself, 'very jealous of the contraption.'

Now that he had found himself, Octavius practised night and day. He improvised from six to eight, composed from eight to twelve. From two to six he studied new compositions by other composers. And from eight until long after midnight adding his own implicit touch, he would vary these and others of himself until he came up with a nocturne or a movement for a sonata.

Oval saw nothing of him except in bed. She did not work any more and heard him all day long. He had done something else for her too. He had bought her the borrowed dress.

She fumed, fretted, raged. How could she keep him from the machine? How spoil or add to his music so that he should come to her? She sang at lunch and supper. In the evening she danced to his music. Nothing worked. He had forgotten her as totally as the sun forgets an eclipse. She was ignored.

A symphony of his was to be played on a Saturday night in February to a large audience at Lucerne. He left two days early in order to get there on time. He did not offer to take her with him. She did not offer to go.

On the first day of absence she lay in bed crying. On the second day she got up, ate a little, drank too much, and went back to bed. On the third day she stood by the Playel piano in the parlor, burning his manuscripts in the fireplace. On the fourth day she took an axe and dismantled the piano. On the fifth day (the day he was to arrive home) she shot herself with a pearl-handled revolver she bought by pawning the dress he had given her. It was not fatal. The bullet passed through her left lung. On the sixth day she bled to death. And on the seventh he came home.

'Fate,' as he said to Gustave Cremier, 'geared all things to music.' He had not known she would shoot herself when he left. But, in Lucerne after the welcome reception accorded his symphony, he felt if he did not go home right away she most probably would. They were doing Gluck that night and Handel the next. 'And how could I miss a Swiss performance of the Messiah?' He could always get a charwoman to come in and clean.

Trez

The Uses of a National Theatre

by Martin Esslin

I

Although the continental European knows that basically the English-speaking countries belong to his own culture, he is also constantly aware that in a number of ways they are beyond his comprehension, more essentially different than any one European country differs from its neighbours. Why is it, the continental asks, that the Anglo-Saxon countries remain attached to complicated non-metrical systems of measurement? Why do they separate ideology and party allegiance in their politics? And why don't they have national theatres?

To the continental intellectual that last question is by no means as trivial as it may appear in Britain and America. It all depends on the value placed on the theatre as an expression of national culture or as an amenity of civilized living. The average Englishman or American would certainly express contempt for countries without universities or hospitals. To the educated continental the theatre appears as at least as important an amenity – far too important to be left to the whims and eddies of private enterprise which only supplies it in places where there is a mass demand for it.

We all know the reasons why the theatre has never succeeded in establishing itself as an essential part of the national culture in the English-speaking countries: puritanism, the rigorous control of the public purse, the absence of petty princelings who vied with each other in emulating the court of Versailles and all the other historical causes that lie behind the present unorganized and anarchic state of the theatre in Britain, America, Australia or New Zealand. Moreover on the continent the possession of a national theatre came to be regarded as one of the hall-marks of a nation worthy of independence: hence the enormous emphasis placed on the development of national theatres in the younger countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe from Helsinki to Moscow.

Yet, even if the continental's equation, 'a country without a national theatre equals a country without culture', is false and based on a misunderstanding of the universal validity of purely local valuations, it still seems permissible to inquire what the uses of a genuine national theatre, the acceptance, that is, of theatre as a public amenity, might be in our own countries in our own time, when puritanism has been eroded in so many other fields and the idea of publicly provided services has expanded into so many other spheres of the national life.

II

In Britain, of course, the movement for the creation of a National Theatre has been in existence for half a century. More than once it seemed as though its objective, the building of an impressive centre in London, had been generally accepted, its implementation a mere matter of time. But when it came to it, nothing happened. There was always a good reason why the money, already voted by Parliament, could after all not be made available: two world wars, economic crises, pressure of other business. Surely, if the nation and public opinion really had thought the building of the National Theatre important, it would not always have slipped so low down on the list of priorities. This is the crux of the matter: before there can be a national theatre in the true sense of the word, there must be public awareness of its functions, there must be a real understanding of the need for it.

This, it appears to me, is the point on which the advocates of the national theatre in Britain may have been at fault. Their attack was pressed forward on far too narrow a front. They wanted, above all, a building in which the plays of Shakespeare could be regularly performed. Or at least they gave this impression. Their propaganda did not succeed in arousing the public's attention to the real object of their endeavours, which was bound to be far wider than the mere provision of one building or one company of actors. Such a National Theatre would be doomed to failure, unless it were regarded as the symbol of the final victory of the idea that the theatre is of sufficient importance to be provided as *a public service* throughout the country, that in fact the theatre is an element in the national culture rather than a mere marginal entertainment. It is certainly curious that in Britain, where the idea of broadcasting as a public service was born and developed into a model for the rest of the world, the concept of public service theatre should be so alien as to have hardly ever been seriously discussed.

And yet, if music and drama as well as political comment and news can be purveyed in broadcasting and television by a public service, if the creation of the BBC's Third Programme, which would certainly never have paid for itself in a purely commercial world, is regarded as a major triumph, why should the provision of first-class theatre in the flesh be regarded as a luxury too sinful even to be contemplated? After all the State and the municipalities already provide collections of pictures and objects of historical

value in museums and galleries; they already make available good literature in many hundreds of excellent libraries financed by the rate-payers; and they do so because they know that such public services are important, essential for the well-being of the nation in the same way as public drainage, road-building, health services etc. are essential (enough not to be left to the operation of the principle of private profit). Only when it comes to the theatre the view is different.

III

But, it is said, there simply isn't the demand for theatre on the scale or of the quality here postulated. If there were such a demand the mechanism of the market would provide it within the present commercial system. Certainly at present there is no such demand in the English-speaking countries outside the metropolitan areas. Nevertheless such an argument puts the cart before the horse and confuses causes with effects. Good theatre is, like all good things, an acquired taste which needs to be cultivated and nurtured. If cities like Chur (less than 20,000 inhabitants) and Lucerne (about 70,000 inhabitants) in Switzerland, Turku (about 100,000 inhabitants) in Finland, Malmoe (about 150,000 inhabitants) in Sweden can supply regular audiences for theatres that are world-famous for the excellence of their productions and the high literary level of their repertoire, this can only be due to the fact that the inhabitants of these cities have been brought up to acquire the habit of, and the taste for, an occasional evening out that presents a real challenge to their intellect. And it must be stressed that the theatres concerned cannot be compared with the 'repertory theatres' that still eke out a meagre existence in British provincial cities by presenting bravely produced plays with the scantiest of means. The muncipal theatre of Lucerne for example not only has a regular repertoire of the classics and the best modern authors, it also presents full-scale opera and excellent performances of musical comedy on a scale that might shame many a London West End production. The Muncipal Theatre of Malmoe boasts Ingmar Bergman as its regular director and shows more interesting and challenging plays in a single season than the West End of London in five years.

IV

Why do the city fathers of these towns provide their theatres with subsidies that are often larger than the whole year's Arts Council subsidy to all the theatres of Britain? Not merely because they

regard the theatre as an important educational factor, because they feel that no generation should grow up without having seen the finest works of their countries' literature, but also, and above all, because the possession of a theatre is considered as an essential amenity and an important ingredient in the social fabric of a community. A city without a theatre of a good reputation simply cannot aspire to the rank of an important centre. Would people of talent and culture settle in a city without a theatre? Certainly not. Thus if new industries are to be attracted, if men and women of talent are to be drawn into the existing trades and industries of a town, a good theatre is regarded as essential. And, of course, the people of the theatre, the actors, designers, musicians, ballet-dancers, become a very important element in the social life of such a city. The hard-worked actors of English 'reps' or American summer stock do not have the leisure to make their presence felt in the same way as the artists of the more generously subsidized and more lavishly staffed continental municipal theatre can. There the leading actors together with the local doctors, lawyers, clergy and gentry form the nucleus of local society and add their characteristic spice and excitement to it, playing their part in shaping standards of dress, speech and behaviour. Many a novel of continental small-town life centres round the arrival of a new star at the local theatre and shows how the presence of this leaven brings life and movement into provincial society.

And what is more, a theatre is an essential amenity of civilized urban life which helps to create other amenities. By attracting a regular public into the centre of cities it ensures that life continues even after business hours. Cafés, restaurants, the continued running of public transport and a number of other benefits are at least partly due to the presence of a relatively large and well attended theatre at the centre of urban life and guard the continental city against the death which turns the usual English town into a barren desert at nightfall. It is no coincidence that the movements to create viable theatres in British cities, such as the brilliant but ill-fated attempt of the Shakespeare Theatre in Liverpool, or the pioneer effort at a municipal theatre at Coventry, have particularly emphasized the combination of theatre and community centre.

V

Yet, important as these considerations are, the real argument for publicly supported theatre must spring from its own function: the

theatre is by far the most effective means of bringing ideas, beauty, poetry before a wide audience, which, at the same time, is not a mass audience. Being vivid and alive, colourful and glamorous, and being an experience between living people on both sides of the footlights, the theatre remains the most effective means of bringing human beings in touch with the highest level of artistic creation. The mechanical mass media, radio, television and the cinema, can never become an effective substitute for the theatre. Moreover, not being a mass medium, the theatre has a far greater ability to experiment, to try out new forms and techniques, to give young writers a chance to learn their trade. It is therefore the essential proving ground of the mass media. Most of the successful plays on television are tried successes from the theatre, most successful filmscript writers have earned their first experience in the theatre. And, of course, without the proving ground of the theatre, the supply of actors would dry up. Already the lack of a living, effective theatre in Britain outside London, and perhaps Glasgow, forces the regional television productions of drama to rely on actors brought up from London. Hollywood relies not only on Broadway but on little theatres and universities, not to speak of all the continental actors who have risen to Hollywood stardom from the proving grounds of Europe's municipal theatres.

However important therefore the cinema and television may be in diffusing culture and ideas in dramatic form to the largest masses, if they are to be kept supplied with new ideas, new writers, new actors and actresses of real skill they will depend on the continued existence and expansion of the theatre. The theatre is bound to remain the creative centre from which the mechanical media will have to take the material which they diffuse to the masses. In the same way in which the experiments of Cubist or Expressionist painters finally reach the masses in the form of posters or magazine advertisements influenced by them, the achievements of the experimenters in the theatre from Strindberg to Brecht and Beckett will eventually reach the masses in the style of new types of television plays, television design and television acting. But the theatre will always remain the centre and powerhouse of all such development. That is why the *avant-garde* theatre, the laboratory of daring new experiment, is of such immense importance.

IV

But are publicly supported theatres, the *Comédie Française* or the Vienna *Burgtheater*, the places for experiment and daring

innovation? Are they not rather the staid purveyors of accepted greatness in the form of classical dramas traditionally exhibited as in a museum? In some respects this objection holds good, but only up to a point. The *Comédie Française* may be the home of Racine and Corneille. But then, there are a number of other, equally lavishly subsidized theatres in France whose function it is to be daring and experimental: Vilar at the *TNP* has brought Brecht and Alfred Jarry before a wide public. And only recently Jean-Louis Barrault produced a full-length play by Ionesco at the *Odéon*. So in fact in France the case is merely one of a division of labour among a number of subsidized theatres, each of which concentrates on one aspect of the functions of a well-rounded National Theatre. Elsewhere, in countries that do not provide the same lavish range of publicly supported theatre, most National Theatres have their 'small house' where experimental plays are performed. But even if it should happen that the officially supported theatres become lazy and unexperimental, they still continue to perform an essential function: for even in that case they provide the standard against which the opposition can pit itself. If one studies the history of the theatre in most continental countries this pattern emerges very clearly. Whenever the main 'National Theatre' fell into a phase of 'academicism' the counter-movement was bound to arise. And in the end the young people of talent among actors, directors – and critics, always prevail and win the day, planting their standard on the stronghold they have attacked. They may have grown middle-aged in the process and their own style may itself become academic in due course – but only to give rise to a new counter-movement.

Far from being a mere museum for the exhibition of the accepted classics – and that is by no means an inessential function – a genuine, broadly-based publicly supported theatre is an important condition for the rise of a vigorous dramatic literature. Most municipal and State theatres on the continent are under an obligation to devote a certain proportion of their new productions to the staging of new works by local authors. Admittedly, at times, this may produce performances of works that ought never to have been written. But at least it provides a market for young writers of talent and prevents them from devoting themselves to other and less insecure fields of literature as so many promising young writers in Britain and America have done, who have been lost to the theatre for ever.

Admittedly, the existence of a large number of subsidized theatres eager to give a showing to local dramatists is not in itself a guarantee that great plays will be regularly written. The present state of dramatic literature in Germany is a case in point. No country has more, and more lavishly subsidized, State and municipal theatres than Germany. Yet no major, hardly any minor, dramatists have emerged there since the war. The reason for this failure of creative talent, however, lies deeper than in the sphere of the theatre alone. It springs from the profound shock and reversal of all standards produced by the rule of National Socialism. The major poets, novelists and essayists are also lacking in present-day Germany. In Switzerland, which, in its German-speaking part, belongs essentially to the same tradition but which escaped the pernicious influences of Hitler's reign, the policy of keeping a proportion of the repertoire reserved for the work of young writers of talent has fully proved itself. Friedrich Duerrenmatt and Max Frisch are among the outstanding younger dramatists of our age. They might well have confined themselves to writing novels and short stories had not a tempting and relatively profitable outlet existed for them in the numerous municipal theatres which make even the smaller towns of Switzerland centres of culture and gracious living.

VII

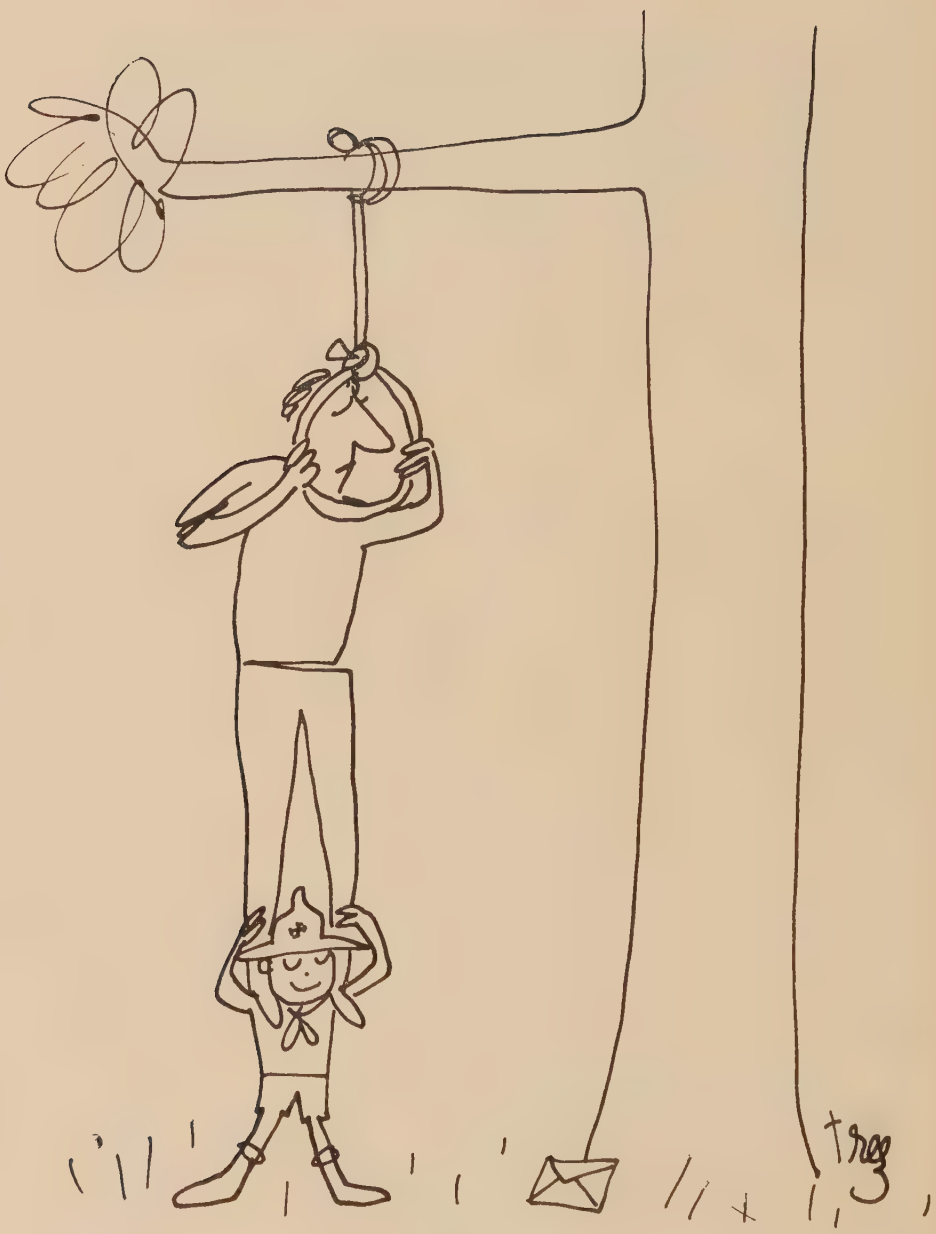
And what is true of the writers applies even more forcefully to the actors, directors and designers. A broadly based theatre, which is not confined to the most populated metropolitan areas, provides a stable and dignified form of employment and spares the artists the vile scramble for the favour of producers which disfigures the theatrical scene in London or New York, where the commercial theatre relies on a reservoir of unemployed actors to mount its *ad hoc* productions. Permanent companies of actors not only save them the need to devote a large proportion of their time to cultivating the good-will of agents and producers; they are the basis for the development of real style in 'ensemble' acting. Only if theatres can afford to have a relatively large number of first-class actors under contract (in some of the larger continental theatres the number of actors in one company often lies between 60 and 100) can productions be planned at leisure and sufficient time be devoted to rehearsal. The productions of the Moscow Art Theatre or of Brecht's *Berliner Ensemble* are often rehearsed for months,

even the better part of a whole year. Such a scale of rehearsal allows genuine experiment: a number of different conceptions can be tried out at length and the best solution found for any problem. In this way only can the very highest perfection be achieved; only thus can young people really learn their craft and great men of the theatre like Stanislavsky put their ideas to the test. And only where artistic standards are high and steady can the public gradually be made to develop its taste and to appreciate the finer points of acting and dramatic writing. This also is the basis upon which really informed and constructive dramatic criticism can develop which is free from the erratic amateurism of so much of current dramatic reviewing in the English-speaking countries.

VIII

It would be foolish to imagine that the deeply ingrained puritan traditions of the English-speaking countries can be changed overnight. The creation of the climate of opinion from which, if it ever comes, a vigorous and inspiring theatrical life can spring, is sure to be a heart-breaking, uphill struggle. Yet undoubtedly this is an issue of extreme importance – and urgency. As the material level of our civilization improves, as leisure becomes ever more widely diffused and occupies an even larger time of the ordinary man's life, the problem of culture, of the values that can fill the lives of human beings in a human manner, becomes ever more crucial. Is the world of the future to be like Huxley's 'Brave New World', one in which human beings become mere automata whiling away their time with drugs and vulgar narcotics, or is the technological advance of mankind to bring us the possibility of a flowering of the arts, an age of beauty and dignity for all? At present the signs still point in both directions. The rise of the mass media of communication has made it possible to bring the best music and literature to the largest number of human beings. And already the popularity of classical music on long-playing records, of high-class writing in the form of paper-back books, shows what can be accomplished in this direction. The creation of theatres as artistic and social centres throughout the most highly industrialized and urbanized countries of the world would provide an even more effective means of arousing a genuine interest in the things of the spirit and in artistic values. The theatre after all is the institution which could most effectively bring together a variety

of arts and artists. It provides a living co-operative centre for musicians, designers, writers, actors, dancers – and beyond that, if it were made a genuine community centre, it could become a meeting-point from which intelligent discussion and higher standards of taste could spread to ever larger numbers. In the coming struggle against the gradual mechanization and automatization of the human spirit the concept of the theatre as a public service will have a vital part to play.



B. A.

Marble

by Pierre Gascar

To Alice

From a long way off, you could see the paler patches on the mountain side like a fall of chalk in the middle of the sombre thickets of mixed green-oak and pine which managed to grow in those places where the stone cropped out, together with brambles, unknown plants veined in blood and bushes of a thousand species which even at midday, when nothing more than the tireless grating of an insect survives, kept a little of night at their base.

These lighter coloured steeps, almost always near the crest, look like avalanches carrying rocks coated with rusty sand leaving, at the edges of the ravines they hollow, shrubby trees with roots hanging like aerial plants and tufts of grass which draw life from the wind.

Sometimes people climbed down the ravines in order to discover on those stones returned by landslides to daylight, effigies of the vegetal or marine world which the mountain had hidden; shells, starfish or skeletals and, even as they turned over the rocks, that thin, laminated shadow on which the fossils rested fled as quickly as a lizard, vanished like a black puddle pumped out with a single steaming breath. Then they discovered that darkness existed and lived.

Clarity is the quality popularly ascribed to reality though in truth it wears the black bandage of the one-eyed. Even here, even in this Mediterranean sun.

Coming in from the sea you would leave the ravines, pass the crest again and reach the marble quarries where geology gave way to buried palaces. The shafts of the mines and the blows of the picks uncovered walls, platforms and steps, as if an immense construction had been freed – a construction without doors or windows, seemingly entire and deprived of inner spaces and chambers save when, hewing the dense walls, the heart of the pyramids was reached, a narrow keep, sealed more tightly than death, filled with emptiness and night – useless, but serving to regulate that absolute mass of marble around it in ramparts, bastions and façades. A castle new and intact, for the cuts rid the marble of its patina and wear and gave back to it its colour and its grain; a castle always begun again, each day truer, more exact, but soon stepping back, flying before you, offering to the sight and to the touch only its forward defences, with still other defences behind them; while wounded marble fell with the resounding noise of a siege, endlessly victorious and in vain.

At the front of the quarries, despite the break and uprooting caused by the mine and the picks, the stone's rough-grained surface,

somewhat rimed by imperceptible crystallizations of calcium, seemed natural and presented the true appearance of marble. Under the hand, the chill communicated by the slow bite of the lime dissolved a little: in the polishing, pushed to the point of glassiness, which would be given it in the valley, the chill would return.

From then on, the design of its mutilation would be encased under a transparent, adhering surface, like glass laboratory slides. With its veins and its vessels and its often vivid colouration, the marble seemed very much like flesh stunned by smooth incisions on its thickness and so congealed forever.

Glorified by polishing, it composed, according to its tint, fixed landscapes of sunrises, sunsets and clouds in the same solemn light. But the mountain and all that surrounded it stayed submissive to the seasons, plunged into a confusion of light and shadow under restive and uncertain skies.

In this contrast, all the symbols of royalty seemed to be comprised. Polished and sculptured, the marble affirmed the existence of an order whereby man, by dint of his nobility, was reunited with the divine, the sole order of existence which merits consideration, all the rest being but provisionary states or worthless accommodations.

This insuperable distance found its images too in the mountain where the marble workers lived in solitude and in the town where all, and first the marble, was transfigured by the needs and labour of the people of the mountain and then by the wealth of the merchants down below; in the ugliness or roughness of the women of the mountain and the lissom beauty of those other women who, farther away, walked in paved streets, sometimes wearing buttons of marble on their dresses, or ornaments of malachite, onyx and ivory, all mixed up together, frivolous trash taken in handfuls from the moraine which, in mist and in sunlight, the marble pushed endlessly before it.

. . . During the day and sometimes, when night was already coming – with a last effort and with a prolonged squeaking of the pulleys as if it had agreed to complete some vague citadel raised up against the darkness, the marble, colder than ever in the evening air, seemed only a stone like all other stone, merely higher up and slower to move, in the clatter of impatient horses.

At night, in front of this pale catafalque of marble, late workers could be heard as they ran through those baulks of oak which, from the top to the bottom of the mountain made a trackway for

the blocks. Most of the men were of thick stiff-shouldered build like great apes – from which they differed by a pensive carriage of the head and a motion of the arms which somehow constituted a sort of mute declaration, caused perhaps by the speed of the run, or the necessary balance on the cross-pieces, still shining from grease and abrasions.

In many of the regions of Italy, the method of working marble quarries was carried on by centuries-old methods. Blocks were slid towards the valley along wooden rails coated with grease. Behind the stone and holding cords which circled it, men regulated its direction and its pace. A simple enough process, despite the exacting effort, if the requirements of the more important quarries had not substituted for that slow and laborious 'descent of the body' – like a funeral procession – a veritable travelling belt.

Crossways junctions where, under the weight and the turning motion of the loads, timbers loosened; convoys passing on parallel tracks meeting on landingways where men, suddenly freed from the burden which they had braked for the entire length, abandoned themselves to momentum; this complex net-work, this conjunction of controlled drops, slippery falls, all that chaos, as well-regulated as it could be, multiplied risk.

But the dangers were not only those of being crushed under the blocks, the leg they might flatten or the arm they might pulverize, but also the blow they might, in passing, give the back or the chest, if one's head turned a little; like that first blow of a still silent quarrel at a rowdy dance – a kind of attack whose gravity one is not aware of until moments later, when its weight begins to press on the flesh which becomes blue, when the air seems suddenly withdrawn, and that veil on the light and that silence in which the pines stand, may, as tomorrow, be perhaps the light marble of death on oneself.

That is why, around their bodies, the men superimposed a soft armour composed of layers of fabric, leather and felt where the shock of the blocks might be smothered. They defended themselves against the marble as they would against the cold, or, clad in the life-jackets which their garb seemed to resemble, as they would against shipwreck.

. . . They pulled woollen caps down to their eyes. Hooded so and buried in heavy clothing, they had a fierce or rather disciplined air. Sometimes, their grotesque and austere attire seemed like that of uniformed custodians buttoned to the chin and immune to insult; at other times it seemed like the garb of slavery.

For up there was the place and the time where authority wavered. In the region where they hauled the blocks up, near the summit of the mountain, one could not know whether the men still exercised domination over the marble or whether, already, they were excluded from that throne which it was going to consolidate, further down. The kingdoms were confused, as were the deposits of the various kinds of marble. Primeval black or white or porphyry or port wine or obscurely shot through by yellow veins, the same colour could suggest a funereal or religious procession just as well as one of secular ostentation. For the same marble assured the solemnity of riches and death, thus affirming its imperturbable faithfulness to the order which it proudly symbolized when at last it stood above graves. Preferably in the sound of foliage endlessly animated by the wind.

For marble corresponded to the subtlest motions of nature, even in its raw state, even at the heights of the quarries. A little in the manner of stones drowned in the transparency of a current which restores their colour, it permitted the measurement of the flight of darks and lights and stood witness to the secret freshness which dwells, like a permanent truth, behind the fevers of life and its darkenings.

Nothing ever changed, except the sea. One could see it – blue, grey or green – in the distance, pegged by the brief whiteness of waves on windy days offering, so near to rigour, a mobile element and its own uncertain marble.

Many of the workmen came from Romagna and were unmarried. They lodged in barracks built a little towards the eastern slope, beside the ravines, midways from the summit. From there, the sea could not be seen. Every morning, while climbing between two wooded plots to the quarries, the men discovered it. The daily encounter infected them with something like that happy languor of dawn which, in men at least, comes with the desire for love.

Facing the sea, recovering breath sharpened by the climb, they would stop an instant and stretch. Summers, they dreamed of bathing in it though none of them ever said so. Nor did they ever, during the remainder of the year, discuss that which continued to haunt them. They would resume their way to the marble, to the injustice of their lot and their solitude.

When evening fell they would sleep without desire filling their dreams, which were only of collapses and blows, and of hammerings and entanglements too, for their universe was in part made up of

that enormous structure holding, above hollows and disposing into vales, the roads of wooden rails on which the blocks slid. Ceaselessly reinforced, strengthened by the addition of new pilings and new beams, it seemed to all purposes an interminable prison courtyard of crossbars, a labyrinth of scaffoldings where they moved and worked at repairs and took shelter against the rain, picking the pale grass which grew between the stones in the now grey day as, further away, the sea vanished.

One team worked in a quarry smaller than the other from which they extracted a white marble which fell under the designation of statuary marble. It did not always have the purity demanded of it. That other marbles were sometimes iridescent, holding shells and pulverized coral, was of little importance – there was a market for all. But white marble destined for sculpture must not contain any thread, any scoria and, least of all, those 'puff' parts where the striking of a chisel is suddenly muffled and accompanied by little plaster-like crumbling. It must offer, in trade terms, only 'proud' sections – that is to say hard, and of the whiteness of lard.

They dug further, opening within the quarry vast galleries, as if the illusion of successive castles had vanished and one could run directly towards the heart of the mass, towards that black tabernacle it hid. Even there, within its depths, purity was rare. Rotten veins made fragile by marine weevils at times streaked 500,000-year-old blocks.

When an irreproachable lode was reached and a stone with a grain as compact as alabaster extracted, purity had not yet been acquired. Despite its homogeneity, and its plenitude, marble remained confusedly lived in. It was known to be destined for the sculpture establishments in the largest of the valley towns which furnished half the nation with industrially executed holy figures. Buyers were offered a great variety of subjects; baroque angels, saints in traditional attitudes, Virgins and Child or, simply, Virgins. These last were most in demand: of all statues they were, doubtless the most satisfying. With its whiteness, its delicacy, its secret luminosity, marble extracted from this tiny quarry was, properly speaking, Marian.

Those workers who on feast days entered the churches of the town or passed before the shops of the marble merchants discovered these frozen people who had been held in sleep by the blocks on the heights. The existence of these figures skilfully made human by sculptors who delivered up models destined for standardized

reproduction gave, the rest of the time, a sort of 'readability' to the raw marble drawn from the mountain.

This was due less to fancy, for workers are not given to day-dreams, than to that almost mechanical reckoning in which people bound to practical work indulge. In front of the length of a block they had just extracted, they were led to imagine the height of the future Virgin and to give it, in their minds, the proper rotundity. The thickness of the block would seem to reserve it for Her; then at various points there would be the coming forward of a breast while further down, other vaguer feminine sinuosities were already limned in the chill marble displacing it here and there raising it up, like a serpent sealed in a sack.

This inability to place or replace the Virgin in the block gave the men more than a professional difficulty – the feeling of childish ignorance too. It had been given them to see naked women, to hold them in love and thus acquire familiarity with their bodies. Here they discovered that she was an illusion. Of all memories, that of love wears away the quickest, like marks of ash, forms of mist which only a furious desire can restore. Like water in the hands, all has fled, while each time, in front of virginity, desire endlessly revives.

It came like the sea which could be glimpsed between the bent and wounded pines. In the motion of surf and mingled veins of water and undulating currents again, more shadowy and, at the same moment, more vital than in the marble, but as far away, the desired presence would rise.

The workmen knew that they would no longer discover this longed-for presence – had they ever discovered it? – in the valley dances where, on weekends they went to embrace factory girls, who gave themselves sometimes, summers in the grass, winters against walls, in the noise and smells of the town, in confusion and laughter, fear and abandon and that thoughtful pleasure which made them thrust nail-bitten fingers into the shoulders of the men.

Mornings after, the men would climb back to the face of the marble. First teams would have already left the mines whose fumes tore through the pines and whose echoes fled towards the blue, green, grey sea forever scoured by dreams and foam. Their mouths bitter from the night, once more they would begin loosening and hauling from the immense depths of the mountain, sarcophagi of saints and goddesses. Inaccessible people; desired and cursed!

Not even saints and Virgins escaped the chill of marble, the

fitting fate men wished for their enemies – tyrannical overseers, faceless managers, disloyal companions. Death ought to 'marblelize' them. Because, if you hate, death is not dead enough. It is still weightless. It dissolves more than it immobilizes. It impinges on the living world.

Death to these men had to be heavy with a burden of marble, dragging its victims like drowned statues towards the bottom of the waters, towards an obscure and endless beaching-ground. In their hearts, they also sought the same heaviness in love and dreamed that at some time, on some night, a pure marble of the colour and light of camphor would open itself to receive them.

It happened that, in the town where they went on Sundays, they heard about a young woman who posed for one of the sculptors charged with creating statues of the Virgin. He did not confine his talents to these. His income assured by pious commissions, he made allegorical figures through which he hoped to convey his sensibility and his greater talent – Peace, The Seasons or the souls of rivers – an entire multitude of naked virgins.

By turns, the woman embodied all of them. She had become the sculptor's mistress after having lived with two important marble dealers in the city. She was beautiful but less buxom than most of the women of the countryside. Her body was not precisely thin but, to define it properly, exact, and it gave a singular keenness and almost a perversity to the symbols fashioned by the sculptor's chisel. Virgins, too straight in their robes, evoked that kind of self-assertion in giving of oneself which binds love to a certain hopelessness. Peace suggested the immovable desire of women. The Seasons had deep eyes and a sad and ardent questioning. Although none of this was stressed, they yet, without shocking a soul, substituted love's nostalgic truth for the traditional image of feminine patience and fecundity.

In town, Clara was known to be inconstant not by reason of interest, but of inclination. The reproach surrounding her was free from any scorn. Clara's pride and elegance were so powerful that, when she passed in the streets of the city, she left nothing behind her but silence. To comment, to question, would have easily led to those kinds of conclusions after which all life is nothing more than regret and endurance.

People merely deplored the fact that Clara loved Manuce the sculptor, a fat man with wavy hair and a soft mouth under a thin black moustache. He was known to be avid for wealth and honour

Did he love her? Yet wasn't this one of the thousand truths of her nudity, one of the forms of her dispersion in the multiplication of her statues, one of her functions as a public Virgin?

When they had discovered Clara's existence, the workers felt great bewilderment. That faceless woman whose fleeting measurements they traced in the blocks was real! Each wished to see her but Clara went out very little and nobody could point her out to them. She remained remote and her legend grew richer . . . it soon came to be that of Evil. The men mistook their disappointment over not knowing Clara by relegating her to that unknown and hostile world where marble and women sold themselves. Clara was venal, perverse. Ordinary sins were not enough for her. It was necessary to invent others, still nameless and shapeless, species of maggots born in the lees of the night.

Life was only night with her. Night began to weigh heavily in the marble, no longer that pure night of the deeps, but an indelible night of the colour of faulty tavern wine. How easily with women one accusation attaches itself to another! They came to believe that one day they would come to the point where they could no longer look at the sea without suffering.

Among the workers in the quarry of white marble, all mature men, conscious of the sadness of their lives but aware that it was too late to strike further for another, was a boy hardly twenty named Carlo. He had come to work on the marble while waiting for something better after floods had ruined his parents' farm, somewhere along the Po. His face had a childish softness which contrasted with the vigour of his body developed by hard work in the quarry. Docile, seldom speaking, embarrassed by his overly virile frame, he aroused paternal feelings among the men of the marble. They admired the fact that, constrained by the injustice of fate to accomplish inferior tasks, Carlo showed himself so helpful and courageous.

This esteem endeared him also to the overseers who, without any bitterness on the part of the others, often entrusted him with sought-after tasks. It was in this way that, one day, Carlo was called to accompany the dray which carried a block to Manuce the sculptor who, caught by an urgent commission, found himself short of material. Carlo was to help the driver unload the stone.

They had arrived in the courtyard of Manuce's house and were sliding the stone from the truck's platform when the driver momentarily released his grasp and a corner of the block hit Carlo

in the chest. Before coming to town he had rid himself of the protective plastron worn by all the quarrymen. It was hot. His shirt was open. The sharp corner of the marble slashed and blood began to flow.

Manuce, supervising the unloading, sympathetically led Carlo within his house. The boy sponged at the blood with a handkerchief and repeated that it was only a surface wound. But Manuce had a tender heart: his art had made it necessary. Even, it gave him compassion. Already he saw Carlo as Saint Sebastian. He pushed him forward towards the vestibule upon which the studio opened. Through the door he called Clara.

Carlo had often heard Clara spoken of at the quarry. He was seized by shyness. He again said the wound was unimportant: it stopped bleeding. He raised the handkerchief which he held against his chest: the wound still bled. The door opened. Clara was drawing her wrapper together.

'Make him a dressing,' Manuce told her. 'I'm going to help his friend take the stone inside.'

Clara bid Carlo follow her. They crossed the studio. The light was of a wintry crudeness. Carlo noticed that Clara had dark black hair. It was tied and fell over one shoulder, exposing the oblique, brownish nape. Clara climbed the stairs which led to rooms arranged like a loggia. She stopped on one rung, lifted her foot and half-turned in order to remove her sandal in which one of the bits of stone strewn in the studio had stuck. As she shook it, she moved her toes. Carlo looked at the naked foot. His heart constricted. He lifted his head. His eyes met Clara's who quickly replaced her sandal.

They entered a dressing room. Carlo leaned against the frame of the door and raised the handkerchief from his chest. The wound was no longer bleeding. He waited, holding his shirt open with his hands. He felt absurd. Clara bent over in order to search through a cabinet which contained medicaments. The fastening of the wrapper under which she was naked, opened. Carlo saw her breasts. He felt his heart beating. Under her fingers, while applying a dressing over the wound which was located a little below his left breast, Clara would feel that hammering.

She stood up, looked into his eyes and closed her wrapper. She approached, rubbed a cotton-wool pad soaked in alcohol over the wound and applied a compress, holding it down with the flat of her hand. Carlo's heart still beat rapidly. Through the gauze,

together with the burning of the alcohol, came the weight and warmth of Clara's hand.

Beyond the compress the painted fingernails exerted a light, irregular pressure on his bare chest, as if that beating heart caught under her palm had transported itself to her fingertips. Again, their gaze met. She was grave. He burned. It was he who first lowered his eyes.

Pushing a cart on which the block had been laid, Manuce and the driver entered the studio. Manuce spoke loudly and laughed. He liked to show that he was exhilarated by physical effort.

From the end of the studio Carlo could be seen against the frame of the door which opened on to the loggia. Moving a little, Clara drew him inside the room. There he felt like putting his hand on her hair. He would not have been able to say why he sought that gesture. Clara caught his wrist and brought his hand on hers. She quickly withdrew it. He understood that he was to hold the compress while she got a bandage to fix it in place. On his chest, she applied two pieces of adhesive tape to hold the dressing.

Then, as if she wanted to show that the treatment was over, or as if she wanted to keep a last reminder of that contact they had shared, she put her right hand in the middle of his glistening chest, slowly spread her fingers, folded them, smiled and, brusquely turning her back, went to replace what she had taken from the cabinet. Carlo mumbled thanks and went quickly from the room, buttoning his shirt.

During the ride back, he could not stop a feeling of depression. In climbing towards the quarry along avenues of tracks where men clinging to the ropes which held the blocks shouted words he did not understand, he had to stop along the way in order to catch his breath. It was one of the places where the sea could be seen. But he took no notice.

That night, in bed, he tore the dressing from his chest. He lay on the wound. It burned a little. He thought of Clara. He again saw the thick hank of wavy black hair which streamed on her shoulder, her breasts whose nipples shone in the wrapper's shadows, the sad deep eyes. The next day, his heart continually in disorder, he returned to the marble.

Never, in contrast to his fellow workers, had he imagined it immanent. The usually obscure words with which the older men hinted at the presence of Virgins and saints inside the marble

seemed always to arise from a need for disrespect which this overly hard life and loneliness justified. Previously, when their gross hands stretched like compasses on the surface of a block of marble and they amused themselves by taking Clara's measurements with commentary generally opposed to the coldness of the stone, Carlo would flee, embarrassed by this spectacle of mental onanism.

Now everything had changed. The jokes of his companions bringing forth future statues of Virgin-Clara were painful to him. Even more were the reveries to which he, in his turn, was led. Nonetheless, surging from these blocks of marble would come images of her who had caressed his chest and who belonged to him more than if she had given herself to him, for those furtive gestures, that allusive complicity of the flesh had established for his body the equivalents of whispering, of confidences where more of the heart is revealed than through luminous words. It was also true that aside from those moments where she impersonated a Church Virgin, Clara posed in the nude before a man to whom she had given herself.

Incessant reminder. Endlessly, blocks were being drawn from the quarry and if all were not destined for Manuce and his copyists there was always at least one among them which slid on the rails of the track, taking Clara into itself like a corpse to deliver her and take her away forever and send her further towards the hell of nakedness.

Summer came suddenly. The sun warmed the marble and gave it a glitter which wounded. In the shadow of the pines one could see the length of the passing blocks radiating a glorious light. On the other side the sea shone too. Remote joys. On the mountain, summer was arid, lighting landslides and cliffs of broken marble in the shade of which only the bitter smell of thorns revelled.

One Sunday, Carlo went down to the town and placed himself in a gateway which hid him from view opposite the house of Manuce. He remained there for several hours. Towards evening, Clara and Manuce left in a coach. Carlo took a step from the gateway. While Manuce was busy manœuvring, Clara saw him. She looked at him for a long time. The carriage left.

The following evening, Carlo returned to town after having asked his overseer, under a false pretext, permission to leave work earlier than usual. He resumed his watch. A quarter of an hour

later, Clara crossed the street and entered the gateway. She had been watching for him since the previous evening. She did not give him her hand and she spoke very little. She returned without stop to peer in the street. They would meet the following Sunday in a little village beyond town. She was on time for the tryst. They walked through the countryside and became lovers.

From then on, they met two or three times a week at an inn in a remote district of the town. When they were somewhat freed from the weight of their silence and from the oppression in which love held them, they began to talk about their lives. Carlo ordered Clara to leave Manuce. She asked for time. He was angered. Then, they made love again as if for the first time, in the same way that the eyes close against too splendid a day.

After awhile, it chanced that men from the quarry saw Carlo in Clara's company as the two were leaving the inn. Clara's elegance and beauty alarmed them. They made inquiries from the owner who knew everyone in town and they learned that Carlo's friend was Clara of the statues.

The news swept the mountain. Carlo's fellow-workers were scandalized. The paternal feelings they had for him made them suffer. They would have rejoiced had he known some good fortune, and if he had brought to it that cynicism which, to them, was inseparable from virility. But to love Clara was to render oneself accomplice to the sacrilege she perpetuated by giving herself to men – she, hardly out of the marble and still stiffened from posing as the Virgin Saint of Supplication. More than just offering to others the kisses of Sainte-Appoline de Manteleco, she dragged Carlo into baseness. Was he not aware of this?

Carlo hung his head. He did not know how to answer the older men. He did not wish to renounce Clara. He thought she ought to live with him, leave Manuce and stop serving as a model. Again he told her so. Again she smiled at so much impatience. She feared poverty and was not certain she would always love Carlo.

At the quarry, insults followed reproaches. Contempt surrounded Carlo. He began to be ashamed of himself. In order to go down to the town, he hid himself, no longer taking the path his companions followed, he ran down the slopes of landslides and sometimes would fall. Stunned by his haste he would rest for a moment, hands on the stones, slow to get up, wishing to awake, later, in the truth and calm of night. But again he would rise and go to the inn. Clara would be waiting, sitting in a corner of a room stalked by shadows.

She would undress, they would make love and, with the coming of darkness, Carlo would return by the landslides, alone again among the stones.

This torment lasted several weeks, at the end of which Carlo resolved never to see Clara again. He told his companions. They congratulated him. He lost sleep. That evening, he went between the pines to look at the sea. There, when the weather was clear, one saw the design of the currents and the moving striations of the waves. In the shadows, the coast curved in the light of the beach.

Why did life have so many faces and among them that of goodness and truth? All that which the sea offered – drowned hair, haunch of waves, buzzing of deeps, slow tang of salt, fleeting half-warmth and cold, that other death, that abandon found in swimming and recovered only in love; yes, why was it only one force among others, neither more nor less true that the others on the solid earth, which yet held mysterious contours and riverside zones along lagoons?

Clara suffered from Carlo's absence and, even more, from his disdain. She felt, too, that her unhappiness was like the sea. All that she had known, suffered and lived through, all those she had loved, all that which she had enjoyed before this love, seemed nothing but a succession of dead statues and pale effigies. She was chilled by all that marble to which she had lent herself, in that desire to multiply her image which ended by making life make-believe.

She suffered in those glowing days of summer, when, sometimes in the deserted streets she was passed by carts carrying blocks of raw marble from the quarry, marked with a red cross and with a cypher she had never seen before. There, in the sun, they haunted her, as signs of the infamy of statues and of tombs. And, endlessly, she saw again that unknown and clumsy boy who, on a day already in the past, arrived before her with blood on his body, that mute boy bitten by the marble, whose eyes fell before hers. Why didn't he come back any more? She knew. She decided to leave Manuce and go to the quarry to tell Carlo.

She took a road which passed at the foot of the slope opposite that on which the long blocks of marble descended. She left her cart then, and began to climb along a path towards the summit, but this soon lost itself on the sloping mountain side. On the edges of the ravine which the sliding of the earth had made, stood erect little oaks and bushes, some of whose roots were already blanched by dryness and hung over the void.

Clara climbed on through stones. A little later, she came upon thick bushes which barred the route. Thorns scratched her legs and hands and caught at her dress. In the heat that the shrubbery held the powder of pollen and insects arose. Clara was overwhelmed with fatigue. Sweat glued her hair. She suffered from thirst already, a bitter thirst probably due to the acrid dust which came from the bushes. She reproached herself for having put on her black dress, an absurd formality. Her back, exposed to the sun, burned under the thin material. She began to feel that she would never reach the summit.

She was surprised not to hear any sound coming from the quarries which were situated just on the other side of the crest. She climbed more and more slowly, twisting her ankles on stones revealed one by one, as if each were landmarks, furrows dug by ancient rains, humps where rocks nested, round or oblong, marked in white and yellow. Short of breath and frightened, she stopped a moment and felt a kind of stupor. What was she doing there, on the flank of this deserted mountain, devoured by light, she who stripped herself in cool houses and lived in idleness?

Already far away, the valley below was getting bluer, its villages dwarfed and revealing the checkerboard of the fields and lacework of brooks and roads. Clara was astonished that she had come so high already and she felt, taking hold of her, a singular joy at having done so. She saw the sky whitened by light and she rejoiced in the ardour of that solitude. She felt happy in her pain, her sorrow, her thirst, and once more took up her climb to the summit.

She was on the point of reaching it when two blasts of a horn sounded. She did not understand their meaning but she thought that they had come from the quarry and she moved towards the place where they had originated, a little to her right, behind a rocky projection which stood out from the crest. The horn sounded twice again. Clara hurried on, carried by the joy of having reached the goal of her climb, held completely in that exultation which had entered her along the way.

She emerged on the side of the quarries furrowed by steeps studded with enormous sections of marble and crossed over by timber ways which bent towards the valley. She crossed the rocky ledge where blocks of marble made a shadowy corridor. Then she heard a cry.

Lower down, a curiously dressed man, cap pulled to his eyes, was making emphatic signals in her direction. She did not understand

what he shouted. He started to run, shouting all the time, towards a place at the flank of the mountain which blocks of marble hid from Clara's view. She leaned against a stone from which she gratefully felt coolness entering her body. Beyond, the man still shouted and shouted.

The mine exploded. Opened from all parts, the cornice slowly tore off, stood suspended an instant in the suddenly silent air blued from the dust, and fell on Clara in a powdery cloud.

The laying of the mines provided a respite for the workmen, and Carlo had gone into the pine woods. He looked at the sea, which could also, he told himself, be an image of good and of truth. He would go and find Clara again, that very evening, in town.

Translated by Robert Dash

A Connecticut Yankee

by Kress Rosenthal

Martel Vincone stood on the rock and cast a satisfied eye upon the simple natives. From across the entire extent of the plain they looked back at him. Some were gathered in little bands and attended him with half-turned heads: they were largely occupied in asking each other about what happened? who was he? in short, why was everybody else curious? Some were not so detached and asserted a boyish bravado by glowering distrustful hostility at the outsider; others stood dull and agape.

On the rock, onto which he had scrambled to avoid dirtying his black business shoes in the poor, plowed but unturned earth, Vincone grew more and more confident. His earlier fears and uncertainties were almost completely gone. In fact he began to smile. He smiled a small, benign, patient, superior smile as he slowly surveyed the unexpected landscape and its equally unexpected inhabitants.

He was certain he was not in the right place: his intended destination was a hard, hurried, industrial city on the Principal Sea; and here there was not the slightest suggestion of sea, or industry, or very much of a suggestion of a city. Here he could see only a village of tapia huts hemmed between the spur of the most abrupt hills and the level expanse of beige dirt that filled the floor of the valley.

Vincone adjusted his French cuffs so that they protruded beyond the sleeves of his blue gabardine suit; they, like the suit, had been disarranged by the activity of mounting the pedestal. In order to accomplish this preening it was necessary to effect a transfer from arm to arm of the two articles with which he was encumbered; a box-shaped affair, veined in relief with strips of colored plastic, which was originally secured in the crook of his arm, and a cowhide sample case held in his left hand.

His grooming done, Vincone shifted his gear once again to port, thereby leaving his right hand free for salutations, and prepared to leave his ararat.

However, as soon as he took a first step down toward them, the folk gathered around him began shrinking away frightened. Vincone froze in place and added an additional touch to his reconsidered toilet: he buttoned the middle and uppermost buttons of his single-breasted jacket; then, holding himself erect, he addressed the folk.

'I am in the wrong place.'

As he expected they did not understand, but the dignity of his speech confirmed him in a position of respect among them, and he continued.

'My name is Vincone. I come bearing no malice.'

At this point the crowd gathered itself into a greater unity and from out of its depths produced a leader, a middle-aged man with a hardy, work-bent physique. He walked barefoot to the rock and replied to Vincone in a strong, widely-modulating, respectful voice and an unintelligible language.

The fellow finished speaking and stood looking up at Vincone in an attitude of reverent expectation. Vincone answered the look; sternly and imperiously he informed him that he would require shelter and food until he should be able to go back to his own people.

Remarkably, the spokesman comprehended. He turned and summoned two young men of impressive height, who walked to the rock in unified cadence and, with great delicacy, bore Martel Vincone to the village, astride their shoulders.

He found himself placed inside the largest of the huts in the village: the granary, apparently. It was stacked on all sides with large, shallow baskets of millet and barley. The stacks were several deep, flanking the low entrance that arched over a foot-high threshold, so that the light from outside the hut seemed to exist in a different kind of air from that which the oil lamp burnt within; and the two were connected by a kind of tunnel.

Weariness began overtaking him almost immediately after he had consumed the sticky, honey-with-barley gruel they had brought him. He thought for a moment to go to the entrance and ascertain whether or not he was being guarded, but exhaustion soon dispelled any inclination toward activity. He sank back in his straw bed and was absorbed into a half-wakeful reverie about the nature, or more correctly, the level and type of people he had fallen among.

Did they possess the wheel? Were they a hunting and gathering society? Or were they herding or agricultural? From appearance thus far it would seem that they were agricultural: they were permanently located near land that showed signs of systematic cultivation. He thought he would have to devote some time, when he was better rested, to recalling more accurately the meanings of these various terms and typologies and the implications they held for his present circumstance. Were these people in the Stone Age? The Old Stone Age or the New Stone Age? Or perhaps the Bronze Age? Martel Vincone was in the Atomic Age.

Did they have domesticated animals? There had been some pads of old dung on the main street, so he assumed they did. What kind? The impulse to conclude a deduction was strong within him. He felt the bedclothes to see if the textiles were of wool, and thus if this were a culture which possessed the sheep.

In the dim light, and with his unskilled touch, he could not decide whether the covers were of wool, or cotton, or linen, but only that they were of textile and not of skin. He forewent the satisfaction of a solution, and reaching out, he snuffed the rag wick into the oil in the bowl of the stone lamp. As he passed into slumber he moved his oil moistened finger near his nose, smiled faintly and gave a satisfied mumble. 'Lanoline,' he said, as sleep took hold.

Martel came awake with a start. The interior of the granary was more thoroughly illuminated than it had been before he extinguished the oil lamp. Several women were squatting on the beaten earth floor and arranging vessels of various shapes upon a grass mat spread by the side of his pallet.

During his sleep the stacks of grain baskets along the walls had been festooned with wild mountain flowers, whose dry brilliances were suggested by their barbaric contours but not seen in this unnatural light. There were also, strewn about the foot of his bed, plants of the type called wood-flowers.

This uncanny setting presented to him by the wavering light of a proliferation of stone lamps, called Vincone to a state of wariness. The jagged shadows of a poinsettia-like growth swayed above his head, and the limned images of the wood-flowers danced behind the stems and shapes of the flowers themselves.

Once again, as when he had first glimpsed his situation on the plain, he felt fearful and uncertain, and once again the fear and uncertainty were quickly dispelled: these proceedings were evidence of the natives' respect for him – the decorations and the arrangement of bowls on the mat were propitiatory offerings.

Martel collected himself around this thought and addressed the women, who had now completed their offices and were rising to their feet.

'Leave me.'

The women walked out of the granary.

He lay still on the straw bed until they had gone through the portal, skillfully stooping beneath the low-slung lintel and high-stepping clear of the raised threshold. He then threw back the

covers and lifted himself upon an elbow so as to look down into the earthenware pots and bowls which he had seen the women placing beside him. Inspecting and meditating, he guessed their various contents to be these: a lumpy, viscous concoction of fermented milk curd, small yellow berries, warm milk, boiled meat mixed with leaves, and another bowl of the same gruel he had partaken of before he slept. He was hungry, but the sight was not appetizing to him and brought him certain queasy misgivings about having eaten so incautiously before.

Martel sat on the side of the pallet, which was low to the ground and gave him little elevation, so that his knees were propped high, rested as small a part of his feet as he could on the cold mat and scouted about for his shoes, which he could not remember having removed. He found them in an unexpected place, put them on, stood up, straightened his now considerably disheveled clothes, and began to set his affairs in order.

First he looked for his almanac. It was not immediately visible in the incomplete light, and then he caught the shimmer of its plastic case atop an overturned grain hamper, and alongside it he discovered his sample case.

He removed the cover of the almanac and found the delicate, glass reading screen and the slender, thorium coordinates undamaged. He wanted, however, to double-check this instrument upon which it might be necessary to place considerable reliance. Vincone wet his index finger with his tongue and began rapidly shoving the adjustment tabs back and forth and after a few moments left the several sets of coordinates in a new constellation of spatial relationships. The reading screen indicated '20.0.' Lamb must be boiled twenty minutes to kill all harmful bacteria. 'Sounds reasonable,' said Vincone aloud as he replaced the lid of the almanac.

In the sample case, opening it, he found little that seemed to be of use. There were three variously shaped wall-containers for janitorial deodorants, which, along with the containers, were his company's product. In a corner of the case, slipped under arched strips of imitation leather, were a couple stacks of slick brochures; for Martel Vincone was a traveling salesman, a time traveling salesman. Due to a mechanical malfunction in the space loom, he had been woofed when he should have been warped and thereby arrived in this subminimal market area.

Martel lifted and shook each of the wall-containers. None gave

the little thumps that would have meant a partly evaporated deodorant block sliding within. This he regretted; for though he was now used to the several odors of the granary, he remembered and deplored them.

Next he emptied his pockets and arranged the contents on the bottom of the upturned grain basket. His wallet produced nothing that had any but sentimental value other than his identification. In his side pockets he found a comb, rumpled handkerchief and change; in his shirt pocket a ball-point pen and in his lapel pocket another handkerchief, a clean, pressed one. He fumbled briefly with the communications in his inside breast pocket but decided they said little to his present problem and so replaced them.

'Comb, two handkerchiefs, pen, wallet, travelers cheques, fifty-seven cents,' said Vincone. He pocketed all the pocket-sized belongings. He closed the sample case. He took up it and the almanac and made his way to the entrance.

Emerging into the sunlight, he found himself alone. He faced across the as yet unplanted valley and saw the sun just clearing the tops of the low hills at its further end. The beams of light caused the rock in the middle of the plain to point a shadow, like the hand of a one-handed clock, along the earth toward a spot somewhat left of where he stood. He stooped, gathering into his hand a few clinkers of dirt and mashed them into fine crumbles, which he threw up in front of him. They fell undisturbed through the calm morning air.

He turned to the sound of a bare foot gently grinding the soil behind him and saw the chief, the middle-aged man who had greeted him the day before, standing beside the entrance of the granary, holding a wooden hoe over his shoulder. Behind him Vincone saw other villagers, newly issued from their homes, milling about the street. A large number of children were actively and gainlessly employed, playing among the adults, some of whom, irrespective of sex, carried crude farm tools.

The chief bowed to him an obeisance, and after many of the other villagers had followed the example he beckoned to several young men who were apparently preparing to go to work in the field with the rest. The chief talked to them for several moments, and they remained with Vincone while he and most of the inhabitants dispersed onto the plain.

The party left in Vincone's company made no sign for him not

to move about freely, so Martel, in the hope of coming upon some trustworthy food, set off on a tour. His companions followed wherever he led. He walked toward the slope of the steep hills that lay behind the village. The beginning of the more definite ascent proved farther back than he imagined; so that by the time he arrived at the point where some really difficult climbing began he had been tired by several hundred yards of walking, although the young men with him, whom he remarked to be in far superior physical condition to himself, showed no ill effects. After laboring a few hundred feet up the main slope he lay down to rest, concealing his weakness by making a rather considerable display of surveying the somewhat narrow vista presented by this small elevation.

He saw over the tops of the huts to where the villagers bent toiling on the plain. He could dimly discern their activities from the distance. By main force they plied their crude and malformed implements so that they were able to scratch shallow, straight furrows in a soil that seemed never to have been fertile or to be well past its first freshness. They conducted their operations in such a manner as to be hoeing at right angles to the striations wrought by their previous labors; so that one simple pattern was intersecting and prevailing over an identical complement.

He must teach them the mortar-board plow, he thought. They could dig more deeply into the soil and turn up fresh, new soil each year while turning under to let lie fallow the stubble of the previously harvested crop. They could accomplish all this and yet be relieved of much of the boredom and drudgery of their present method. It occurred to him that there were many things he could give them. Their low technological level left them wedded to uninterrupted, monotonous drudgery and an ineffectual, superstitious attitude toward their environment; they were consigned from birth to a simple, unremitting cycle of work, procreation and death. They passed their entire lives without the possibility of a single grander fulfillment. He focused his eyes nearer, at the spot just below him on the hillside, where the youths from the village lolled at his feet, waiting for the end of his rest. Vincone realized he had duty to them, the very reverence of their attitude toward him obliged him to give them what they expected from him, a better life, a life emancipated from interminable work, a life with meaning. He would give them life itself: the automobile, the airplane, electric lighting. 'All things in time,' said Vincone, 'all things in time.'

When he rose to his feet the men with him stood also, having from the ground each a leaf of horse-grass or flower stalk to chew on. They walked on upwards, crossing at one point the transverse meander of a small ravine that angled down from the interlocking slopes of the hills above. Here they paused awhile in the shade of some dwarfed cottonwoods. Vincone observed the natives eating quantities of the small, early-ripening berries familiar to him from his untouched breakfast. He began picking them and packing them into his sample case but reconsidered and ate them unwashed. He was still hungry. Eating the berries made him feel weaker rather than refreshed and he cast about for something to augment his diet. The almanac said that portions of the licorice root, wild rhubarb, bistorta, and parsnip, for all of which it gave cursory descriptions, could be eaten safely, but Vincone judged it would be unwise to attempt such a discriminating identification with his inexperienced eye for botany.

Farther up the slope, beyond the lowest copses of scrub oak, he saw, at length, a flock of sheep attended by a few shepherds, but he soon desisted from his attempt to reach them, which proved tiring, and returned to the village.

The return, like the return of most trips to indefinite destinations, seemed shorter than the trip going. He arrived in the village somewhat after noon doubly fatigued by the climb and the extra burden of several large mineral specimens which he brought back in addition to his almanac and sample case. The villagers hadn't returned from the fields; they had probably eaten their noon meal there.

Leaving his followers loitering around the street, Vincone crept briefly back into the granary and nibbled a hasty, grimace-accompanied meal from the contents of the bowls by his cot. He gave some thought to further boiling the meat, but the idea of handling and preparing it was more repulsive than the idea of eating it, so he didn't bother.

That night he sat on his cot with his almanac in hand, engrossed in contemplation. The first thing to work on would be the plow, he thought. Possibly other things might be as primary, but one must start someplace. In order to make a metal-shared plow it would be necessary to have metal. Of course one would need tools to work the metal, since the metal for a plowshare had to be hard. He would first work in soft metal, using stone for tools until he found

some means of shaping tools out of hard metal, using something other than hard metal for tools. The thought was confusing, and he continually had to go back over his whole evening's cogitation in order to determine what was the first thing he ought to do. But he realized that mustering one's faculties so as to bring them to bear on a new area of application was always difficult, and his purpose grew more resolute. The important thing was to determine the initial approach to the problem and other things would follow. The trouble lay in the fact that everything from which things would follow, followed in one way or another, something else, frequently itself.

At length he stood and paced the granary and lost himself in a reverie: he imagined he was largely and benevolently dispensing justice and the fruits of technology to these people, building from them a new society, over which he presided as a kind of god. He appeared sunk in deep meditation when a group of villagers came through the entrance. Dismissing his thoughts as unworthy, he raised his eyes to greet his visitors. In the party was the chief and some of the older inhabitants, and they had brought with them a woman.

She was beautiful; or rather she knew she was beautiful in the eyes of the village, and the assurance of her bearing made her beautiful in the eyes of Vincone. Taken detail by detail, her features were not to his rather conformist taste. The mass of hair, over-artfully twisted and piled to an absurd height atop her head, could not possibly be lost on Vincone nor could the fashionably prolific bulges of fat around her buttocks, but taken altogether he found her more than attractive.

It was evident from the manner of speech of the village elders that she was for Vincone's use. When they thought they had made this adequately clear they departed from the granary, leaving the woman behind.

This left Vincone in a quandary. What was he to do? It would be wrong to indulge a weakness of the flesh before the villagers: he would be compromised. It would be impossible to maintain any dignity before them if he accepted this gift: they had undoubtedly brought her to him as a test. But yet, here was a real temptation. He motioned her to go. In return she offered him an obeisance, and he grew suddenly irked at her failing to understand his meaning. He pointed more definitely at the entrance and began shouting, at which gestures she smiled and nodded vigorously. At this

Vincone lost patience completely. He rose to a tower of rage, and the woman's only response was to look a little uncertain. Very soon Vincone's anger was dissipated, and he sank limply onto his pallet. In a short while he was less than fully awake, vigorlessly lusting after fantasies.

The next day and for several days thereafter he continued his labors, begun on the day of his climb up the hillside, to improve the technology of the village. In the course of his metallurgical endeavors he spent some time heating stones over a fire some of the inhabitants kindled for him in the street. One of the stones exploded and blooded the hip of a bystander, but he was unable to smelt metal out of anything.

In fact none of his inventing was successful: the irrigation devices he thought of were all infinitely less feasible than any the natives had already in use; even respecting janitorial deodorants he found himself inadequate. He knew they really had little to do with the sap of pine trees. Experiment as he might in his improvized laboratory he could come upon nothing at all satisfactory; and so, in spite of his experience in the deodorant business, Martel's latrine smelled too.

He continued, however, to press his project. With the aid of the almanac he sought further among the mineral formations on the hillside for metal ores. He even examined the surface of the tilled field for pebbles which might minutely resemble the almanac's description of iron or copper or gold bearing ore.

It was while he was out making such an exploration that he chanced, on the far side of the rock that projected from the middle of the field, to come upon a thickly heaped pile of gnarled oak branches. The pile was continually being added to by men and women carrying armloads of wood, some still green, recently cut from the copses of scrub oak on the hillsides. He knew instinctively for what reason the pyre had been set up there.

He was to be burned as a fertility sacrifice. His body was to be made incense so that the planting might yield the sparse growth of cereal that these simple people considered bountiful. He stood stricken still, at first incredulous, sensing moral right on his side for his unmenaced existence among these people, he had a service to perform for them. The villagers stopped their work when they noticed his presence. They stood holding their bundles slack in their arms, openly and expressionlessly staring at Vincone.

That night he went to bed in the granary frantic and alone. He had misread his relationship to the tribe. Villagers stood outside watching the entrance, and a new profusion of wood-flowers adorned his chamber.

Yet his horror was not despair, and that night he calculated and consulted his almanac, and he discovered that on the morrow, the day of his prospective immolation, there would be an eclipse.

The next morning, the dawn of the seventh day since his arrival on the plain, they came to get him. The same two tall youths who had carried Vincone from the rock a week before, now, with equal delicacy, bore him back.

They came for him as he stood behind the granary, watching the slow ascension of the sun, which had moved farther north, and day by day pushed southward the point of the rock's shadow that each dawn fell toward the village; so that now the sun, the rock, and the granary stood in alignment, and Vincone was indicated.

Some of the village women followed Vincone into the field carrying baskets of seed they had taken from the granary.

When he arrived at the sun-side of the rock, where the pyre was heaped, he was set down on his feet. The villagers were ranged close about him, looking off toward the sun. Vincone adjusted his posture and looked too. Never had the sun seemed to him so much an object in flight, nor the sky so much in motion, and the earth so still.

Perhaps in order to hold off that anxious moment when he must put his scheme into operation and invoke the eclipse, call, upon these people who threatened him, a visitation of the dragon that would devour the source of the light of all days, Vincone stood a long while gazing with the villagers as the new horizon revealed itself. He clutched his almanac with both hands. Finally it was certain that a narrow band of sky extended itself between the sun and the hills, and Vincone felt himself being clumsily seized and saw hands holding leather thongs.

He wrested himself free, took a step forward and turned to face them, but they weren't looking at him. Looking over his shoulder at the sun's disc, he saw that it was no longer perfectly round, and he instantly realized that he was relying upon the moon, that he had only thought of the sun's eclipse but his destiny rested with the unseen moon. He turned and pointed dramatically, but they already saw.

The curved bite in the sun's side grew gradually larger as the

sun rose farther above the land. He began to speak, but the natives paid no attention to him, and in the end he too fell into silence and turned to watch. The valley grew darker and darker until suddenly the sky and earth blackened completely. Only a dim corona gave the people on the plain vague silhouettes.

A man screamed. The sounds of mumbling and shrieking filled the floor of the valley. The shadows of men and women hunched closer to the ground and began writhing in the agony of darkness. The image of Vincone alone stood unchastened by fear. He held his almanac and stared upward until the press of the natives closed tightly about him and he was shoved back and forth, helpless, in its midst.

The people crawled on the earth, and he felt the close caress of their bodies against his clothing. The stench of their massed breathing filled his nostrils. He choked and fought at the crowd, wrapping his hands tightly around the almanac, but it was knocked from his grasp. He fell to his knees. Pivoting and crawling he dug among the mass, groping for the delicate instrument.

If there were a sun upon that darkened plain, it would reveal not a single erect figure.

Notes on Contributors

VANCE BOURJAILY, novelist, has written *The End of My Life*, *The Hound of Earth* and *The Violated*. His new novel, *Confessions of a Spent Youth*, from which the story in this issue is taken, will be published in September by the Dial Press. Mr. Bourjaily has taught in Iowa State University and is now living in California.

MALCOLM BRADBURY is English, teaches at Hull; his novel, *Eating People is Wrong*, was published last year by Secker and Warburg in England, and in the Spring of this year by Knopf in America.

JACK CAREY, who is in his thirties, was born in Bristol and educated there and at University College, London, where he has been teaching since 1955. His first poem appeared in the *London Magazine* in 1958.

ERIC CASHEN is a young writer living in Baltimore. *Triste* is his first piece to be published internationally.

JOHN COLEMAN, poet and critic, writes for the *Spectator*.

RICHARD EBERHART is professor of English and poet in residence at Dartmouth College and has been appointed consultant in poetry at the Library of Congress for a second term, 1960–61. His *Collected Poems*, 1930–60, will be published simultaneously this fall by Chatto and Windus and the Oxford University Press of America.

MARTIN ESSLIN was born in Hungary, educated in Vienna and has been living in England since 1939. He attended the Reinhardt Seminar in Vienna to be trained as a theatrical director. Since 1940 he has been a writer and broadcaster with the BBC and last year he published *Brecht: A Choice of Evils* (Eyre and Spottiswoode). He is now working on a book called *The Theatre of the Absurd*.

PENELOPE FARMER lives at Westerham, Kent, is a student at St. Anne's College, Oxford, reading history. The stories in this issue were written when she was eighteen and are from a collection which will be published by Hutchinson and Co. this year.

JESSE HILL FORD, winner of the Atlantic Fiction Prize, is now completing his first novel, *The Mountains of Gilead*, which will be published by Little Brown. His television play, *The Conversion of Buster Drumwright*, was presented this Spring by the CBC Workshop.

PIERRE GASCAR is a French writer who made a great impression when his book *Beasts and Men* was published in London and New York.

WILLIAM GOYEN is a Texan living in New York. The two stories in this issue are from a collection *The Faces of Blood Kindred* which will be published in August by Random House. He has published a previous

collection of stories, as well as a novel *The House of Breath*, on which he based the play which was recently produced off-Broadway.

BARBARA GUEST has edited poetry for *Partisan Review* and has done art criticism. Her poems, which have appeared in a number of magazines, will be published in book form in *Poems by New American Poets*.

KIMON LOLOS, a native of Salonika and a graduate of Athens University, has published a volume of short stories in Greek. He is now living in Santa Monica, Calif., and is writing in English. *Mistress in her own Home* is the first of his short stories in English to be published. Harper in America and André Deutsch in England, will publish his novel, *Respite*, early next year.

SAMUEL FRENCH MORSE edited *Opus Posthumous* by Wallace Stevens. He teaches at Mount Holyoke and his most recent book of verse is *The Scattered Causes*, published by Alan Swallow.

KRESS ROSENTHAL, a young writer from the West Coast, is now living in Italy.

FRANÇOISE SAGAN is the very well-known French novelist.

DAVID R. SLAVITT is a young New Yorker, went to Yale and is now reviewing for *Newsweek*. His first collection of verse will be published by Scribner in their *Poets of Today* series.

BARRY SPACKS, a former College teacher, is now working as a free-lance writer and has collaborated with Malcolm Bradbury for a variety of journals, including *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Punch*, *Vogue*, *Playboy*, etc. His poems and stories have appeared in a number of magazines.

MURIEL SPARK, who lives in London, is the author of several novels, including *Memento Mori* and *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*. She has also written several plays for broadcasting.

GORE VIDAL, novelist, playwright and critic, lives in New York and is currently running for the United States Congress. His family has a long political tradition and his political play, *The Best Man*, was produced successfully on Broadway.

EUGENE WALTER is a native of the American South now living in Rome. He is well known as novelist, poet and editor.

JOHN HALL WHEELOCK published his first volume of verse in 1911. He is the editor of Scribner's *Poets of Today* Series. Principal works: *The Black Panther*, 1922; *The Bright Doom*, 1927; *Poems, 1911–36* (1936); *Poems Old and New* (1956).

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